

Session 06

Messiah Jesus Rejected by Israel

Jesus' birth took place at a time when there was a high expectation of the appearance of the Messiah. Daniel's prophecy indicated that this was imminent and was probably the context the "wise men" (?Jewish sages) interpreted the sign of the "star" in the East. Galilee was a hot bed of resentment of and of resistance to the Romans. The nobility (Sadducean priests) occupied the space between the oppressing Romans and the downtrodden population and jealously guarded their position of power and opportunity to prosper. Pax Romana was a delicate balancing act. They knew the prophecy about Bethlehem but were cynical and saw no reason to investigate. Herod was paranoid and took violent action.

Zechariah was probably praying for the coming of Messiah as he offered the sacrifice, but without expectation.

Some were aware of God's timing, c.f. Amos 3:7 - Simeon, Luke 2:25-35, Anna, 2:36-38, Joseph of Arimathea, Luke 23:50-51, and **others were receptive to it**, Mary, 26-55, and Joseph, Matt. 1:18-25. In every case, including belatedly Zechariah, 1:67-79, reference, implied or explicit, was made to Messianic prophecies. John the baptiser preached a Messianic message, John 1:19-36, and some who heard him were actively seeking his arrival, 1:40-41, - the One to whom Moses and the prophets pointed, v45 and 49. The Samaritan woman received His testimony, John 4:25-26, 28-29.

Jesus was rejected in His home town when He announced that He was the Messiah who fulfilled Isaiah's prophecy, Luke 4:16-30. His activity **in Galilee** resulted in many followers but their **response was superficial**, Matt. 11:20-24, and contrasted with the relatively few who became true disciples, v 25-30, c.f. John 6:66-69 - they were attracted by what He could do for them, v26-27, and considered Him to be the second Moses, v14 (although inferior to Moses, v30-31), but wanted Him as a puppet king, v15. **There was no true recognition of His identity.** This miracle marked the end of His Galilean ministry;

He went north to **Caesarea Philippi** where He revealed Himself to His disciples as the Messiah, Luke 9:18-20. They were the receptive ground in the parable of the sower and seed, Matt. 13:3-23, see vv 11-12a, 16-17. The great multitudes, v2, were represented by the other three types of ground, v10, 12b-13. Isaiah's prophecy (6:9-10) was entering its final manifestation, v14-15. c.f. John 12:4: 37-41. Such belief as they had turned to hostility when they were challenged to accept Jesus' evaluation of their lives, allow Him to turn their worldview upside down, and engage in radical discipleship, John 8:30-59. Preferring the praise of men to the praise of God cannot co-exist with faith, (Jew/Jehudah = "praise"), 12:42-43, Rom. 2:29; they were aware of the opinions and intentions of the Council, John 11:45-53, and this determined their relationship and response to Jesus, c.f, John 9:18-23.

Throughout His ministry He was hounded by Scribes (teachers), Pharisees (righteous ones), and Sadducees (the priestly/nobility group), each of whom had particular reasons for preserving the status quo. Together they made up the **"builders"** of Psalm 118:22 about whom Jesus spoke in the parable of the vineyard, Luke 20:1, 9-20. The parable was addressed to "the people", v9, but the leaders were present and concerned about public opinion, v19.

Although Jesus was very popular, 19:36-40, 47-48, their perception of Him as Messiah was faulty, **"you did not know the time of your visitation"** v44. They called out "Blessed is the King who comes in the Name of the LORD", v38, Psalm. 118:26, but **not understanding the purpose of His coming - Suffering Servant and then Reigning King**, 13:34-35. It seems that they also were horrified by the parable, 20:16-17. **The day would come when they would have to take sides** - with the builders or those they would persecute. **The ordinary people played no active part in the events of the crucifixion**, Luke 22:1-6; this was confined to the leaders, together with their underlings who formed the hostile mob before Pilate, Acts 4:5-12, 23-28, 5:28, 7:1-2, 51-54.

The crunch would come in response to the resurrection claim of the apostles, affirmed by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, Acts 2:32-36, and whether or not they were willing to "go forth to Him, outside the camp, bearing His reproach", Heb. 13:13. It would be **a test of absolute, ultimate, loyalty** that would determine the future relationship of Israel to the Messiah Jesus and His followers. The initial response was favourable, to the extent of accepting corporate guilt (even on the part of visitors), Acts 2:36-41, 47, 6:7.

The issue came to a head with the growth of the "Sect of the Nazarene" to the extent that it was becoming a threat to the existing authority structure and practice and to conformity with religious tradition; Saul of Tarsus saw clearly what was happening, Acts 2:54-58, 9:1-2. When combined with increasingly violent persecution **neutrality/detachment/compromise became impossible**, Luke 11:23, John 15:18-25. As a consequence of the persecution most of the church was driven out of Jerusalem, Acts 8:1, launching the mission to Judea, Samaria and then to the Gentiles.

The rest of the story of Acts mainly concerns Paul's missionary activity. His first journey was around 45-49 AD, less than 20 years after the ascension of Jesus. From the beginning, in Syrian Antioch, **his regular method was to go first to the synagogue and present Jesus as the fulfilment of the Scriptures**, Acts 13:13-41. Part of that fulfilment was the action of the leaders in causing the death of Jesus, v26-29. The resurrection proved them wrong and that Jesus was the Messiah, v30-37. **The offer of salvation was now made to the family of Abraham** (and those who fear God - God fearing Gentiles, c.f. Cornelius), v26, 38-39. They must be careful not to be in the company of those who had fulfilled the message of the prophets, v40-41, c.f. v27-29. In other words **there was a crisis for Israel; a decision had to be made** - on whose side will they come down?

The initial response is favourable, v43. The Jews did not seem to have had a problem with Paul's message up to this point. During the following week the (God fearing) Gentiles present in the synagogue spread this message to the other Gentiles in the city and they swamped the Jewish congregation in order to hear the message for themselves, v44. Rather than being an occasion of rejoicing it was interpreted by the Jews as evidence that Paul was a false teacher whose **message was threatening all they held dear as the unique chosen people** and their essential beliefs and practices to do with separation and holiness. "They were envious" of that position", and Paul the Pharisee ought to have known better, v45.

Paul was uncompromising, v46-47; **the Scriptures had shown the inclusion of the Gentiles to be part of the plan**, v48-49, 52. **The fault line was beginning to widen, v50-51, and would continue to do so until the gap between church and synagogue became, for centuries, unbridgeable.** Their eyes had initially been opened, v43, but **blindness would come when prejudice overwhelmed the witness of Scripture in the light of the resurrection.** **Paul was pursued by unbelieving Jews as he continued his mission**, 14:1-5, 19-20, even though God authenticated his message in miraculous ways, v3; see also 17:1-9 (note again the motive "envious" v5), 17:10-14, 18:1-6, 12-13, 19:8-10, 20:1-3, 17-19. There were usually some Jews who received his message but they seem to have been a minority who would have been cut off from the main, official, body, 13:43, 14:1, 16:1, 11-15, 17:1-4, 10-12, 18:4, 8, 19:8, 14-17,

As **Paul approached Jerusalem for the last time** he was warned that there the Jews would hand him over to the Gentiles, 21:10-14. The Jerusalem church subsequently re-emerged, as a strongly observant Jewish church under the leadership of James, the brother of Jesus, Acts 21:15-26. Relations with the local population appear to have been "on a knife edge", probably aware that this new "sect" was in open relationship with Gentiles, v25 and they were easily stirred to violent protest, v27-32, 35. When Paul addressed them in Hebrew, 22:1, they were prepared to listen quietly but their hostility erupted when **Paul spoke of his call to the Gentiles**, v17-23.

This appears to have been the central issue all along - the realization that the message of Jesus as Messiah for Gentiles as well as Jews would break down the dividing wall and destroy their significance and status, Eph. 2:11-22. Yes Gentiles could, with difficulty, become proselyte members of the community of Israel but this new message was outrageous and implied that, in response to their unbelief, God was actually turning away from Israel in favour of the Gentiles, v17-21. The crowd went wild with rage, v22-23 and subsequently there was a conspiracy, involving the Council, to kill Paul, 23:12-15.

Paul wrote about "Judaizers" who perverted the message of the Gospel by teaching that Gentiles must first become Jews, Gal. 1:6-10, 2:4-5, 5:1-12. He described the cross as a "stumbling block" to the Jews, 1Cor.1:22-23. They had been given many signs but none of these was sufficient to overcome the offence of a crucified Messiah, even though the idea of a suffering Messiah/son of Joseph was understood by sages in OT times.

The political and religious environment demanded a victorious, delivering and reigning, Messiah. So, with notable exceptions, **the main body of Israel turned away from the Gospel**, falling into line with their leaders. The leadership had chosen with open eyes, in the face of overwhelming evidence, John 11:47-53, Acts 4:13-18, Luke 16:31. **In reaction to Stephen's testimony they "were cut to the heart"**, Acts 7:54 but the outcome was not as in 2:37. **They "stopped their ears" so as not to hear**, Acts 7:57.

As soon as he was settled **in Rome as a prisoner Paul called the leaders of the Jewish community to meet him**, Acts 28:17-20. They stated that "this sect ... is spoken against everywhere". There was division of opinion about his message but the dominant one appears to have been negative.

Once again there is the quotation from Isaiah 6:9-10 - judicial deafness and blindness. Some versions include v29 - they did the typical Jewish thing, discussion and debate, but with no suggestion of faith and repentance as in Acts 2:37-40.

Paul wrote that "their minds were blinded ... a veil lies on their hearts when Moses is read", 2Cor. 3:14-15, and that "blindness in part has happened to Israel", Rom. 11:25, and that as natural olive branches "because of unbelief they were broken off", v20. **He described this as a mystery**, v25 - **something requiring divine revelation**, c.f. Eph. 3:1-11. It is a strange situation that does not make sense to unaided human reason.

Why did this happen? It was multi-factorial, like the crucifixion, Acts 2:22-24, 3:13-18, 4:24-2

- **The sinfulness of man**, envy, ambition, self preservation etc. - wilful blindness, Acts 7:51-53.
- **The activity of satan**, 2Cor. 4:3-4.
- **Judicial blindness**, Isaiah 6:9-10.
- **Sovereign purpose** Acts 22:18, 21, Rom. 11:12, 15, 17, 19, 30. Isaiah 52:13-53:12 spoke of a rejected Messiah and Psalm 118:22 of a rejected stone, Is. 8:14, c.f. Rom. 9:33 and 1Peter 2:8 "whereunto they were appointed". In consequence the Gospel broke loose from what could have remained a Jewish sect, and reached the Gentiles without pre-conditions.

A new chapter is emerging

Israel is being restored and will be restored. God said that a time would come when He would change the way He dealt with Israel, Zech. 8:11-15. The blindness will be healed, Hos. 14:4-9, 2Cor. 3:15-17, and they will be grafted in again Rom 11:23-32. Despite all that had happened to him Paul loved his fellow Jews, Rom. 9:1-5, 10:1, and longed for their salvation. He believed that, in the sovereign purposes of God, 11:32-35, it would happen at a national level, "and so all Israel shall be saved", 11:26.

The process is underway, particularly within the Land of Israel. One day they will receive the Messiah at Jerusalem with these words, also from Psalm 118, "Blessed is he who comes in the Name of the LORD" - in understanding and in faith.