

Having rebuked the ultra religious Pharisees' hypocrisy Jesus departs. He had demonstrated the evil results of their elevation of traditions over the scriptures. He exposed the sinfulness of their hearts. Truly what comes out of our hearts corrupts us. The heart is untouched by the cleansing rituals they so faithfully practiced. Having declared the utter, incurable sinfulness of men's hearts He leaves. Why? To find more receptive hearts? Jesus had been accessible, receptive and responsive to all in Israel who came to Him for help. Now He went into Canaanite country around Tyre and Sidon (or Zidon). These are familiar names, places mentioned repeatedly, 39 times in the Old Testament, 11 times in the New. Sidon is named for a descendant of Ham, Canaan's oldest son, Genesis 10. Tyre was a Phoenician seaport with worldwide commerce between the west and the east. It is mentioned first in Joshua's delineation of the borders of the 12 tribes of Israel, Joshua 19:29. Later Hiram, King of Tyre, was close friends with David the king. He provided materials and craftsmen for construction of Solomon's temple. But some time after that Tyre became infamous for its wickedness and self sufficient independency from God. Its king was likened to Satan himself, Ezekiel 28:12-19. As forecast by the prophets it was besieged and taken by Nebucadnezzar and ultimately destroyed by Alexander the Great. But by Jesus' time Tyre was again a port on the Mediterranean and Paul landed there returning from one of his missionary journeys. The Lord Himself condescends to visit these coasts despite their latter history of defiance of God. God's grace exceeds all of our thoughts.

He had entered a house there. Someone had received Him as a guest. The Gentiles were more accommodating than His own people. But why did He go there? Was He in hiding? Elijah had hid there. He had left Israel after announcing the drought to King Ahab and his court. God provided for him through ravens by a brook in **Decapolis**, on the east side of Jordan. When that dried up God provided for Elijah through a widow in the region of Sidon.

Luke 4:25 But I tell you of a truth, many widows were in Israel in the days of Elias, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, when great famine was throughout all the land; 26 But unto none of them was Elias sent, save unto Sarepta, a city of Sidon, unto a woman that was a widow.

God revisits places which harbored and hid His prophet hundreds of years before. Places where He once blessed, He came to bless again. Wasn't Jesus refreshed there!

But why was Jesus so stiff and unaccommodating to the Gentile woman who approached Him? It was not from a lack of loving desire to bless, as He soon demonstrated. But He had been sent to His own, Israel, God's chosen people. They must be given first chance. The Old Testament prophecies clearly indicate Israel will become the channel of God's blessing to all nations on earth. The Blessor must

visit and bless Israel first.

John 1:11 . . . He came unto His own . . .

The Gentiles had no promises with which to press God for blessing. Yet this Gentile woman presumed upon His grace to request a release for her little daughter from an evil spirit. He rather bluntly reminded her of the favored place Israel had as God's chosen nation. The Jews proudly regarded Gentiles as unclean dogs. He uses that term, dogs, to point out the distinction God had made by calling out a people for a possession based upon His unconditional promises. First to Abraham, then Isaac, then Jacob, then through Moses, and David and the prophets. But the promise also stated that in Abraham's descendant all the nations of the earth would be blessed. The widow humbly took her place as a puppy under His table. He purposely dropped the crumb she was seeking. She left in faith no longer asking but believing. She found the little girl resting, the demon gone. Praise the Lord!

Decapolis. He had been there before, having cast a multitude of unclean spirits out of a wild man. A herd of swine they entered ran into the sea and drowned. The locals had bid Him depart and He did. Now Jesus was back. And they brought a deaf and dumb man to Him. A multitude surrounded Him. He took the man aside and healed Him. They begged Him to put His hand on him. He did. Though He could have simply commanded healing He uses His hands and even His spit to bring about restoration of hearing and speech. Some in other locales had faith for a spoken word, or merely a touch of His garment, or even for remote healing. Even the demon in the Syrophenician woman's daughter was cast out from a distance. However these in Decapolis seemed to expect His hands-on would be needed. He, in lowly grace, complied. The man hears and then speaks. While speech problems often accompany hearing problems and gradually improve when hearing is improved, this was instantaneous, a true healing miracle. Not given simply the physical ability to hear and speak but instant full ability to hear, understand and to plainly speak. They were truly astonished beyond all expectations. They said, these **Gentiles** said, "this man hath done all things well." Wasn't Jesus refreshed there!

What a different attitude Jesus experienced on this visit to Decapolis than His first! Why? What had changed? He hadn't. They had. Why? Could it be the faithful testimony of the man of the tombs? He wanted to leave there with Jesus but Jesus had left him behind to tell others.

*Mark 5:19 Howbeit Jesus suffered him not, but saith unto him, Go home to thy friends, and tell them how great things the Lord hath done for thee, and hath had compassion on thee. 20 And he departed, and began to publish in **Decapolis** how great things Jesus had done for him: and all men did marvel.*

Instead of driving Jesus away they now welcomed and praised Him. They hadn't first welcomed His casting out of the demons but now enthusiastically extolled Him. Later He fed them, 4000 plus.

By Ron Canner, February 7, 2007.