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Did Jesus Envisage a Gentile Mission?

Peter Yeats

[Footnote number 4 was missing from the original printed version. As a result, footnote numbers 5 to 35 have now been renumbered to footnote numbers 4 to 34. The title of the book, authored by Wilson in 1973, as cited in a number of footnotes, was not shown in the bibliography of the original printed version, and is not known. –Revising ed.]

Introduction

This paper had its beginnings in a reading heard at evening prayer. The institution, in which I work, uses the Good News Bible for worship, and the reading was from Matt 20:17-28. Two words, in particular, struck me: in v. 19, the gospel says, "They will condemn Him to death, and then hand Him over to the Gentiles, who will mock Him, whip Him, and crucify Him", and v. 25 says "the rulers of the heathen have power over them, and the leaders have complete authority". The word "Gentile" is quite common, and is used, even by Christians. A Gentile is a non-Jew. But the word "heathen", certainly in modern English, is usually used somewhat negatively. Was this latter word the original word used in the gospel, or was it the choice of the translator?

The answer, on looking at the Greek, was that it was purely the choice of the translator; in Greek the word translated as "heathen" (and in other parts of the GNB as "pagan") is, in fact, the same as the word for Gentile – ἔθνος (*ethnos*). So, given that the GNB, as it states in its introduction, "Seeks to express the meaning of the Greek text in words and forms accepted as standard by people everywhere, who employ English as a means of communication", how justified was the translator in using what is, in English, a pejorative term?

In one sense, the question is not so much about the use of a particular word. As will be discussed later, "ethnos" does have a variety of meanings – but the way in which the gospel writers portray Jesus' dealings with Gentiles, and, especially, the reason for the marked change, which occurs within the gospel of Matthew. In Matt 10:5-6, we read, "Go nowhere among the Gentiles, and enter no town of the Samaritans, but go, rather, to the lost sheep of the house of Israel". By the end of the gospel, this has changed to, "Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations". Matthew makes no attempt to hide the apparent contradiction, whereas, in the

parallels of Matt 10:5-6 (Mark 6:7-13 and Luke 9:1-6), the exclusivist words are omitted. Both Matthew and Mark relate the story of the Syrophoenician woman (Matt 15:21ff; Mark 7:24ff), while Luke does not mention it at all. If the issue of how the early church should respond to the Gentiles had been resolved, albeit with the struggles and arguments described in Acts, before the gospels were set down, why then were the contradictions allowed to remain, unless the writer of Matthew did not see them as contradictions? The answer to this apparent lack of concern, particularly within the gospel of Matthew, could well be found in the writer's particular "Jewishness", and in his view of the place of Jesus within salvation history, from a Jewish perspective.

This paper will attempt to explore whether this underlying theme, of Jesus being the fulfilment of Judaism, can be used to reconcile the contradictions, by looking, in particular, at two strands to be found within Jewish thought, as it relates to universal salvation. The first of these is the eschatological motif, which plays a major part in the gospel of Matthew: Jesus initiated the eschatological dawn, which would bring the nations to Zion. The second strand, which does relate to the first, is that of the place of Israel within salvation history, and, especially, how the priority of Israel could be seen as crucial for universal salvation: a priority, which is reflected in the gospel of Matthew. Both of these strands may help in understanding why it seems that the teaching of Jesus changes, as His ministry, as portrayed by Matthew, progresses.

We shall begin by looking at the way "*ethnos*" is used in the gospels. This will, it is hoped, answer the original question of why the translator of the GNB used the words, which he did. At the same time, it might explain why many of the references to Gentiles can be omitted from the present discussion. We shall then try to examine some of the contemporary attitudes to Gentiles in the 1st century AD. This will help to explain why the two strands of eschatology, and the place of Israel in salvation history, were chosen to be explored further. The discussion will then go on to look at how Jesus is reported, by Matthew, to have reacted to Gentiles within His ministry, looking at some of the arguments presented by scholars to explain the contradictions. The final two parts will try to deal with the two strands mentioned above.

The Use of "*Ethnos*" in the Gospels

The most commonly-used word in the Greek New Testament, which is translated as "Gentile", is the word ἔθνος (*ethnos*) = race, nation, a word used in the Septuagint to translate 13 Hebrew words, all of which have the connotation of

non-Jewish peoples or nations; the Septuagint word for the Jewish people is λαὸς (*laos*) = people, tribe, nation. There are 162 references to "*ethnos*" in the New Testament, the majority in the epistles and the book of Revelation. Within the gospels, the word occurs as follows: Matthew, 15 times; Mark, 6 times; Luke, 13 times; Acts, 43 times; and John, 5 times.

In the case of the fourth gospel, the writer seems to make no distinction between "*ethnos*" and "*laos*", and, therefore, includes the Jews, themselves, into "*ethnos*", possibly because he saw their refusal to acknowledge Jesus as a sign that they, too, were part of the evil world.[1] One rather striking example of this is in John 11:50: "Don't you realise that it is better for you to let one man die for the people, instead of having the whole nation destroyed?", in which the author switches from "*laos*" to "*ethnos*". This may well be for stylistic reasons, but, at the same time, it is interesting that, at this crucial point in the gospel, the nation of Israel is identified with the Gentiles. What can be noted from the writer's use of "ethnos" is that the term is pejorative, but the target of the word is reversed: the Jews are now that which the Jews thought the Gentiles to be.

Luke also moves between the two words, although it has been suggested that he tends to reserve "*laos*" for the church, with "*ethnos*" referring to all outsiders, including the Jews.[2] It could, though, be argued that as Luke/Acts can be seen as the particular "Gentile gospel", written by a Gentile for Gentiles, the Jewish understanding of the two words would be possibly neither understood, nor found to be agreeable; as mentioned above. Luke does not use some of the harsher references made by Matthew, such as the story of the Syrophoenician woman. Either he did not have access to these parts, or else he found them a source of embarrassment.[3]

One minor point, which does arise from Luke/Acts is that, in Acts 10:28, the word ἀλλοφύλῳ (*allophulōi*) = foreigner, is used instead of "*ethnos*". This is the only time that the word is used in the New Testament; in the Septuagint, it is the word used to describe the Philistines.

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[1] N. Turner, *Christian Words*, Edinburgh UK: T. & T. Clark, 1980, p. 302. Cf. K. L. Schmidt, "Ethnos", in G. Kittel, ed., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol 2, Grand Rapids MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1964, p. 371.

[2] Turner, *Christian Words*, p. 302.

[3] For more on the Lukan omissions see Wilson, [Reference details unknown], 1973, pp. 49-51.

As we move on to the other two gospels: Matthew and Mark (and, indeed, many of the parallel references in Luke), it can be seen that many of the uses of the word "*ethnos*" seem to be a criticism of practice, rather than of people, stressing the difference between those who worship the One God, and those who worship many gods. As such, it is translated into English as "pagans", or "heathen". In English, these words have taken on a pejorative meaning, but there are no alternatives in Greek, "*ethnos*", used in this sense, was more a statement of fact; there was no alternative word to describe those who did not worship the One God. In a sense, it was a criticism, as, for the Jews, the worship of the One God was the only true worship, but, unlike the English word, "heathen", which many non-Christians would find offensive, "*ethnos*" was merely a description of non-Jews – even if its context tended to be critical. Examples of its use in this way can be found in: Matt 6:7 ("When you are praying, do not heap up empty phrases, as the Gentiles do"); Matt 5:47 ("the Gentiles love only their compatriots"); Mark 10:42 ("the rulers of the Gentiles are despots"); and Matt 20:17-28, quoted at the beginning of this paper.

This, then, answers the original question of why the translator of the GNB used the words "pagans" and "heathen": in English, there is no real alternative. But, it does not answer the deeper question of why, in the gospel of Matthew, there seem to be two different views of the Gentile mission.

It is worth mentioning here that Matthew, as opposed to Luke and John, is consistent in his use of terms. For him, "laos" is always the people of Israel, and "ethnos" always refers to the Gentiles.[4] This provides us with a clue as to the way Matthew is working, as he provides a clear contrast between Israel, which rejects Jesus, and the Gentiles, to whom the gospel is given. A striking example of this is in Matt 27:25, in which the "crowd" accepts responsibility for Jesus' death; Matthew changes from using ὄχλου (*ochlou*) = crowd, multitude, in v. 24 to "*laos*" in v. 25. In other words, the crowd is not just a gathering of people, but the people of Israel, as a whole.

Jewish Attitudes to the Gentiles

The intention of this section is to try, briefly, to pinpoint the various strands, which seem to occur in the way the Jews thought about the Gentiles, and how they

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[4] L. Sabourin, *The Gospel According to St Matthew*, vols 1 and 2, Bombay: St Paul Publications, 1983, p. 66.

actually treated, and reacted to, the "*ethnos*", especially in the first century AD, in other words, the time which would have influenced both Jesus and Matthew.

One problem, here, is that there are many strands, which can be taken up, certainly within the Old Testament, strands which develop as the history of Israel developed,[5] some more positive towards the Gentiles than others. The general indication seems to have been that, although God has an interest in, and, indeed, a relationship with, the Gentiles, that interest was of little concern to the Jews, and was rarely explored theologically.[6] References, such as Amos 1:3-2:3; 9:7; 19:19-25; and Is 45:1, indicate this divine interest, but there is no comment on it. The writings of the pre-exilic period are, on the whole, more positive than those of any other period. God was seen to be working within a universal context, in His creation of all things, in the covenant with Noah, which was for all humanity, and, in His call to Abraham, in whom "all the families of the earth shall be blessed" (Gen 12:3). This universalism seems to have reached a peak in the writings of Third Isaiah, in which it is prophesied that God will even make some of the Gentiles priests and Levites (Is 66:21).

This positive view changed in the post-exilic period, probably as the Jews attempted to strengthen their position as a nation; both intermarriage, and mixed worship, between Jews and Gentiles were seen, not only as a threat to the Jewish race, but also to the religious community.[7] Much of the thinking about the Gentiles was based on the conclusion:

> "Since the true God has made Himself known to Israel, He is to be encountered only in Israel; and since the God of Israel is the only true God, He is also the God of the whole world. The first conclusion emphasises isolation, and exclusion from the rest of humankind, the second suggests a basic openness, and the possibility of reaching out to the nations."[8]

Thus, the relationship between God and the Gentiles was set within the relationship between God and Israel, and God, not humanity, would work out the

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[5] D. Senior, and C. Stuhlmueller, *The Biblical Foundations for Mission*, London UK: SCM Press, 1983, p. 134; and J. Verkuyl, *Contemporary Missiology*, Grand Rapids MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1975, pp. 91ff.

[6] Senior, *Biblical Foundations for Mission*, p. 107.

[7] S. J. D. Cohen, *From Maccabees to the Mishnah*, Philadelphia PA: Westminster Press, 1987, pp. 50-51.

[8] D. J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, Maryknoll NY: Orbis Books, 1991, p. 19.

ultimate salvation of the Gentiles within the God/Israel relationship. This view can be most clearly seen in the Jewish apocalyptic writings, in which the Gentiles will be led by God to Mount Zion to take part in worship of Him, and in the Messianic banquet. At the same time, there is a strong motif of eschatological revenge: that the nations will come to Zion, but as subjects of Israel, bringing their wealth to Israel, and bowing down before Israel (Is 60:11; 45:14).[9]

The above can be seen very much in a passive sense, in that the expectation of the bringing of the Gentiles to salvation, either through the place of Israel, as a "light to the nations", or in an eschatological gathering, or even both, was seen as being the work of God, without the need for human assistance. Such a fact might explain why there was so little comment on the universalist passages of the Old Testament: the relationship between God and the Gentiles, was noted, but it was God's problem, not Israel's. Yet, even after saying this, there was a certain amount of conflict within Judaism, as can be seen by attitudes towards conversion, an issue, over which Rabbis seemed to disagree: was a convert a "full-Jew", or only a "part-Jew?[10] Cohen makes it clear that conversions did take place, and that, often, converts were fully accepted, but the question still arose as to whether one could be a Jew, without being born as one. The fact that such a question was raised again points to the passive nature of Israel, in the salvation of the Gentiles. If one can only be a Jew by birth, then mission activity is unnecessary, as such activity cannot alter whether one is of the house of Israel or not.

This all goes some way in helping to explain the hesitation of the early church in taking up the Gentile mission. Such a mission, by its very nature, involves an active participation, an actual going out, which contradicts much of Jewish thought, which was more centripetal in nature. This is particularly true of the eschatological strand, but it will have to be seen whether the other strand, Israel, as a light to the nations, can be taken as being centrifugal.

Jesus and the Gentiles

In the gospels, there are only three clear examples of Jesus' helping Gentiles: the curing of the Gadarene demonic (Matt 8:28-34; Mark 5:1-20), the healing of the centurion's servant (Matt 8:5-13), and the curing of the Syrophoenician

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[9] Ibid. For more on Jewish apocalyptic, see D. S. Russell, *The Method and Message of Jewish Apocalyptic*, London UK: SCM Press, 1964; and G. W. E. Nickelsburg, *Jewish Literature between the Bible and the Mishnah*, Philadelphia PA: Fortress Press, 1981.

[10] Cohen, *From Maccabees to the Mishnah*, pp. 50-55.

women's daughter (Matt 15:21ff; Mark 7:24ff). In addition to these, it could be argued that the crowds, who followed Jesus, must have included Gentiles, thus coming into direct contact with Him, although Sabourin discounts this.[11] In the case of the Gadarene demonic, it is never stated that the man is a Gentile, although the text does hint at it: he is looking after swine; the scene is set in the Decapolis, and the man uses the phrase "the Most High God" (v. 7), which, in the Old Testament, is used mainly by non-Jews.[12] The last of the examples, the Syrophoenician woman, is of particular interest, because of the dialogue, which takes place between Jesus and the woman, and especially the language used by Jesus. As mentioned earlier, Luke does not use this story at all.

What stands out in the story are the somewhat harsh words used by Jesus in His original refusal to help the woman: "Let the children be fed first. for it is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs." It is certain that the term "dogs" was an insult, and would have been understood as such. There is some discussion among scholars as to the actual way κυνάριον (*kunarion*) = dog, is used. It has been suggested that it is a diminutive, meaning "puppy", or a household pet, both of which would soften the insult.[13] But, as the story develops, Jesus does relent, but not until the woman has acknowledged the priority of the Jews,[14] or, as Jeremias puts it more emphatically, "Jesus does not grant her request until she has recognised the divinely-ordained division between God's people and the Gentiles. The division "remains sacred".[15]

Wilson goes on to use this story as a way to point out the links between the three examples of Jesus helping Gentiles, and, by doing so, tries to show that they are exceptions to His normal practice. Wilson points out that, in a similar way to the centurion's servant, the healing is done at a distance, without Jesus actually being present with the person to be healed. It must be said, though, that, while this is clearly true in the case of the Syrophoenician woman's daughter, in the case of the centurion's servant, it is equally clear that Jesus was, in fact, on His way to cure the man. He is stopped before He gets there.

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[11] Sabourin, *Gospel According to St Matthew*, p. 72.

[12] Wilson, [Reference details unknown], 1973, p. 11.

[13] For the arguments over the meaning of *kunarion*, see Wilson, [Reference details unknown], 1973, pp. 9-10, and J. Jeremias, *Jesus' Promise to the Nations*, London UK: SCM Press, 1958, p. 29. Jeremias rejects the idea of the word being a diminutive, as Aramaic has no such form.

[14] Wilson, [Reference details unknown], 1973, p. 12.

[15] Jeremias, *Jesus' Promise*, pp. 41-46.

The second factor, which points to these three examples as being exceptions, rather than the basis of a rule, is that Jesus, Himself, felt the need to contradict any idea among His followers of a Gentile mission, in both 10:5-6 and 15:24, Wilson, following Munck, concludes:

"We can go on to suggest that these words may have been spoken to the disciples, to prevent them from misunderstanding Jesus' exceptional dealings with the Gentiles, and concluding that He intended there to be a Gentile mission."[16]

There is, though, a more positive side. If miracles are, in themselves, a sign of the presence of the kingdom of God (Luke 11:20), then the inclusion of Gentiles into the miracle of healing is, itself, a sign of their inclusion in the kingdom. Many of the references to the Gentiles are included as part of a strong eschatological motif, in which the inclusion of the Gentiles into the kingdom of God is seen as a fulfilment of all things. In particular, the symbolism of the Messianic banquet stresses that, in the end, the nations will sit down to feast on the same basis as the chosen people. By using the banquet theme, Jesus removes the common idea of vengeance from the Jewish eschatological expectation.[17] At the same time, He also breaks away from the idea that the nations would come to Zion as subject pilgrims. Jesus shifts the boundaries of who are God's people from Israel, itself, to include all those who respond to the grace of God.[18]

There are, also, important references to the Gentiles, which do not fit into the eschatological category, and which present a much more positive view of a Gentile mission: Matt 26:13 (par. Mark 14:9), and Matt 24:14 (par. Mark 13:10; Luke 21:13). As they stand, both of these indicate that the gospel will be spread before the eschaton. Indeed, Mark 13:10 implies that the gospel proclamation to all nations must happen before the eschaton. They stand in direct contradiction to Matt 10:5-6, 23; and Matt 15:24. There would appear to be two distinct, and contradictory, strands to be found in the gospel. One way of resolving this contradiction is to deny the authenticity of one or other of the strands: Harnack argues that all references to a Gentile mission, in the teaching of Jesus, are not authentic, whilst Spitla rejects the authenticity of the particularist sayings. Bosch accepts both strands as being authentic, and as being non-contradictory; Matt 10:23

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[16] Wilson, [Reference details unknown], 1973, p. 12.

[17] Jeremias, *Jesus' Promise*, pp. 41-46.

[18] Senior, *Biblical Foundations for Mission*, pp. 152-158.

refers to a continuing Jewish mission during the whole period between the resurrection and the parousia, not, in itself, denying a Gentile mission during the same period, as envisaged in Matt 24:14.[19]

A further attempt at resolution is to be found in the concept of "representative universalism". Jesus' primary task was to create "such a community in Israel in the faith that it would transform the life of His own people, and that a transformed Israel would transform the world".[20] As Wilson points out, this view does have the advantage of explaining why Jesus restricts His mission to Israel, and explains His choosing of the 12 disciples as a symbol of the restitution of Israel. But, what it fails to take into account, is the condemnation of Israel by Jesus for their failure to repent, and that He connects the obduracy of the Jews with the future inclusion of the Gentiles, as envisaged in the theme of the Messianic banquet, and in references, such as Matt 8:11; 10:15ff; 11:21-24; 12:38-42; and Mark 11:15-17.[21]

We shall return to this point again, in the final section, as it, in turn, reflects the idea of the Gentile mission being possible only through Israel: Israel being either the preparation for such a mission, or, as already suggested, the refusal of Israel to accept Jesus and His mission, being the cause of the Gentile mission.

The Eschatological Interpretation

Jeremias[22] puts the solution onto an eschatological basis, by reinterpreting Mark 14:9, which, in turn, opens up the eschatological interpretation of the "contradictions" in Matthew. In Jeremias' view, the phrase ὅπου ἐὰν (*hopou ean*) = wherever, should be understood in terms of time, rather than place, as in Mark 9:18, and should, therefore, be translated as "whenever", rather than "wherever"; εἰς μνημόσυνον (*eis mnēnosunon*) = for a memorial, refers to God's remembrance of the woman's deed on judgment day, the term being used, as in Gen 30:32; Num 10:9; and Ps 25:7; and κηρυχθῇ τὸ εὐαγγέλιον (*kēruchthēi to euangelion*) = is proclaimed the gospel, represents the primitive church view of "*euangelion*", found in Rev 14:6, the apocalyptic proclamation of the eternal gospel. Thus, Jeremias

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[19] For these references, see Wilson, [Reference details unknown], 1973, pp. 21-23. Bosch's view can be further seen in Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, pp. 59-62.

[20] T. W. Manson, *Jesus and the Non-Jews*, London UK: Athlone Press, 1955, p. 18, quoted in Wilson, 1973, p. 23.

[21] Wilson, [Reference details unknown], 1973, p. 23.

[22] Jeremias, *Jesus' Promise*, p. 22.

translates Mark 14:9 as: "Amen, I say unto you, when the triumphal news is proclaimed (by God's angel) to all the world, then will her act be remembered (before God), so that He may be gracious to her (at the last judgment)." Although Wilson agrees with Jeremias' conclusion that both Mark 13:10 and 14:9 should be interpreted eschatologically, he does not agree with Jeremias' method, and questions his linguistic arguments.[23] Wilson concludes:

> "We have found that Jesus did not expect there to be a historical Gentile mission, and that His teaching on the Gentiles is inseparably linked with His teaching on eschatology. . . . Jesus believed that the parousia was imminent, so that there was no room for a historical Gentile mission. He maintained a positive hope for the Gentiles, but believed that this hope would be fulfilled in the apocalyptic events of the end time; then, and only then, would the Gentiles enter the kingdom of God."[24]

In many ways, this solution does manage to hold together the two strands in the teaching of Jesus, and explains the way in which the Gentile mission did, in fact, develop in the post-resurrection period. The resurrection can be seen as the dawn of the last day,[25] and the impetus for mission is in the realisation that, although the drawing of the Gentiles to Zion is God's work, "It offers the possibility of cooperating with God, in His gracious anticipation of the decisive hour of redemption, described in Is 25."[26]

It also has the advantage of not only fitting in with the words of Jesus, but, at the same time, seeing the message of Jesus as being a part of, or at least influenced by, the post-exilic Jewish apocalyptic material. At the end, the Gentiles will come to Zion, and worship the One God, and, in Jesus, that end is now, or, at least, the beginning of the end is now.

What it fails to do is to hold together the tension within the gospels of a future eschatology, and, if one can use the phrase, a present eschatology. The eschatological reaching of Jesus is only a part of His teaching, and, to concentrate on it, is to ignore the rest of His ministry, especially the central motif of the kingdom of God. As Kasper points out,[27] this concept of the kingdom of God is

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[23] Wilson, [Reference details unknown], 1973, pp. 25-26.

[24] Ibid., p. 28.

[25] Jeremias, *Jesus' Promise*, p. 74.

[26] Ibid., p. 75.

[27] W. Kasper, *Jesus the Christ*, New York NY: Paulist Press, 1977, p. 74.

not a new idea of Jesus: it runs through Jewish thought, but again very much in terms of eschatology:

> "Eschatological and apocalyptic statements transpose an experienced and hoped-for salvation into a mode of fulfilment. They have to do with the certainty of the belief that, at the end, God will reveal Himself as the absolute Lord of all the world."[28]

Jesus gives a new twist to this, by announcing that the fulfilment of that hope is now, and that the new age has come. His ministry, His miracles, and, ultimately, His death and resurrection, do not point forward to what is to come, but point to what is already present.

Furthermore, as mentioned above, Jesus destroys the boundaries, which the Jews had built up around themselves in the post-exilic writings. Although He never disputes the basis of apocalyptic thought, Jesus redefines the concept of the people of God. No longer does it refer only to Israel, but to all those who respond to God. Narrow nationalism was no longer an adequate boundary.

Universal Salvation Through Israel

In the Old Testament, there is major tension between the ideas of particularism and universalism. The former is the most prominent in the writings, as it involves the basic concept of election: that Israel was the chosen people. As mentioned earlier, and further discussed by Bright,[29] part of the tension is between the ideas of monotheism and election. If there is only one God, then He must be a universal God: yet He has chosen Israel, and has a special relationship with Israel. As already discussed, this led, especially in the struggles for a national identity, to the idea of the subjugation of the nations to Israel, and thus to God. The relationship between God and the nations may have been mentioned, but it was never really followed through.

Mendenhall[30] points out that there is no direct reference to Israel being the "chosen" of God before about 623 BC, although the direct mention of the idea at that time was an expression of a belief already held. The Hebrew word for "election" = בָּחַר (*bāhar*) seems to have two essential characteristics: that of a

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[28] Ibid., p. 75.

[29] John Bright, *A History of Israel*, London UK: SCM Press, 1960, p. 429.

[30] G. Mendenhall, "Election", in *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, Nashville TN: Abingdon Press, 1962, p. 76.

careful choice brought about by need, and the implication of a part of a group being set aside in order to perform a particular function within the larger group.[31] Seebass, in relation to this latter characteristic, says:

> "The horizon of the election of the people of Israel, is the peoples of the world, in relationship to which, as a whole, the "individual" Israel was chosen. "*Bāhar*", as a technical term for the election of the people of Israel, stands under the symbol of universalism."[32]

Thus, in this interpretation, Israel as the chosen of God, is not set aside as a special case, with the nations being, in turn, rejected, but is chosen, in order to perform a special function within all the nations of the world, including Israel. Indeed, both of the characteristics of the word "*bahar*" would, in themselves, seem to discount any form of particularism. The idea of being "chosen" is more of a duty, indeed possibly a burden, rather than a privilege, to those who are chosen.

This all reflects back to the book of Genesis, in which the plan of God is revealed. Gen 1-11 describes the problem, the sin of *all* humanity, the disobedience of Adam and Eve, the wickedness of the people of the world before the flood, and the pride of a united population, which attempts to build the Tower of Babel. Up to this point, there is no distinction in the way God acts with people, unless the distinction is between the righteous and the unrighteous: even the covenant with Noah is between God and "all living beings". In Gen 12, the solution to the problem is presented, continuing, it could be argued, until Rev 22. One man, Abraham, is chosen, not as the sole beneficiary of God's favours, but, so that, "through you I will bless all the nations".

This universalist strand to the Old Testament often seems to get lost, as the writers focus more and more on Israel, itself. The word "*bahar*" came to signify the choosing of the king, during the period of the monarchy, and then the choosing of the sanctuary of the Temple, built by the kings, for the people to worship in. Thus, the concept of election became caught up in a particularist view, which, in turn, led to the eschatological idea of the nations having to come to Zion to worship God at the end. Israel and the Temple were chosen by God, to the exclusion of others, therefore, the others had to come to the Temple as the only place to worship God.

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[31] Senior, *Biblical Foundations for Mission*, p. 94.
[32] H. Seebaas, "Bachar, II-III", in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, vol 2, Grand Rapids MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1977, p. 84.

But, the universalist strand once again becomes more explicit in the prophecies of Deutero-Isaiah, who struggles with the tension produced by the two strands. He deals with the salvation of Israel, but does so in the context of God's work in the world. The exile in Babylon is linked with the slavery in Egypt. But the new Exodus, from Babylon, will be of international importance, involving the collapse of the Babylonian empire, and the raising up of Cyrus as the Lord's "anointed": a foreigner, who is "chosen" to take a leading part in the salvation of Israel. In the devastation of the exile, and in the new exodus, Israel displays its function among the nations:

> "I have a greater task for you, my servant. Not only will you restore to greatness the people of Israel, who have survived, but I will also make you a light to the nations – so that all the world will be saved" (Is 49:6).

As Seebass comments:

> "It [the word "*bāhar*"] is used paradoxically in the preaching of this prophet to show vividly, and clearly, that Israel was chosen for the nations, and, at the very moment she was destroyed, was put in a position, where she could enter into a lawsuit with the nations."[33]

It must, though, be stressed that the more-universalist attitude of Deutero-Isaiah is set within the particularism of the eschatological pilgrimage to Jerusalem, including the motif of subjugation (Is 49:7, 23). What is found in the words of the prophet, is a willingness to talk of God in terms of the world, rather than just Israel.

Conclusion

How then does all of this fit in with the gospel of Matthew, and the question of the possible change in the attitude of Jesus towards the Gentiles, as expressed by the evangelist?

For Matthew, the rejection of Jesus as the Messiah by the Jews is seen as a refusal by the Jews to accept their position as the chosen people of God. Therefore, God selects another group, the church, to continue His purpose. The parable of the tenants in the vineyard (21:33-46) makes clear that the kingdom of God will be given to another nation (ἔθνει (ethnei) = to a nation) – v. 43), because of the failure of Israel to produce the fruit required by God. This can be referred

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[33] Ibid., p. 85.

back to the two characteristics of the word "*bāhar*", mentioned above: Israel was chosen because of a particular "need": the fulfilment of the plan of God. As the need changes, in the incarnation, so, the responsibility shifts to another group. This is not a rejection of the Jews. Being "chosen" describes a function within a group, and the function, which Israel had is given to another part of the group, to be performed for the benefit of all, including the Jews. Indeed, Israel still plays a part in the plan, as the people from whom salvation comes. Jesus does not reject the priority of the Jews, but He does universalise the plan of God more explicitly, by working through the Jews. During His lifetime, there was no point in going out to the Gentiles, as there was, as yet, for them, no good news. What Jesus taught was aimed primarily at the Jews, who, however much they might have disagreed, would have understood what He was trying to say. But, after the resurrection, Jesus, Himself, takes on a new universal significance.

The death and resurrection of Jesus signify the good news of the great commission. Without them, there is no good news for all humanity: only a reinterpretation for the Jews. The gospel depends on the resurrection. The life and teachings of Jesus were set within the context of Judaism, and many of the images and concepts, which He used, were those of Judaism. In this sense, most of His ministry can be seen as a fulfilment of the Old Testament, the particular salvation history, which God was working through Israel, and, as such, was directed toward the people of Israel. This is not to say that there was nothing in His teaching for the Gentiles: the basic ethic of love, the idea that God cares for all His creation, these would have been "good news". But, in itself, the teaching of Jesus was not original: others had said it before. What was different, was the authority, which Jesus claimed for what He taught, an authority, which was ultimately shown in the resurrection. Thus Jesus, in His life, was not denying the possibility of a Gentile mission in the future, but he was denying the possibility of one at that particular time. There could be no Gentile mission, indeed no good news, until the full implications of the teachings, life, and resurrection of Jesus had been worked out:

> "The Christological authority, implicit in the graceful words and actions of Jesus of Nazareth, was now explicitly revealed as the authority and mission of God's Son. This dynamic gives birth to mission theology, properly so called, of the New Testament."[34]

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[34] Senior, *Biblical Foundations for Mission*, p. 158.

Thus, in Matthew's gospel, we see a development in the way the plan of God is both revealed, and carried out. By the end of the gospel, the universalist strand has become explicit, as salvation history reaches a fulfilment. Even the eschatological motif of the nations coming to worship in the Temple is somewhat negated, for Matthew, by the destruction of the Temple, which will remain "abandoned and empty" (Matt 23:38), and by the final command of Jesus for His disciples to "Go" to the nations of the world.

The salvation, which is in Jesus, is not for Israel alone, although it is to be revealed through Israel: the theme reaching back to Abraham, and through the prophets. His mission was to be a light to all humanity, shining, first of all, through Israel, and, from these, to the rest of the world. The time of the Gentiles would come after the resurrection.

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