

## **UNDERSTANDING HOW FAR THE GOSPEL HAD PROGRESSED IN CONNECTION WITH Rom. 10:18(56) and Col. 1:6, 23 (59-61)**

In about 55 AD in II Cor. 10:15-16, Paul expressed his goal. In that reference of going to areas where others had not worked the indication is that in Greece the Gospel had had a wide circuit. In the referenced passages from the two epistles for study it could seem that the Gospel had gone into “all” the world εἰς πᾶσαν τὴν γῆν and ἐν πάσῃ τῇ κτίσει. So retire Paul, lay down and rest?

When we look at such references in their historical setting, we should consider how people spoke then (and even may yet today). The sun stood still in Joshua’s day and the sun rises and sets today. We want to sense the language as people saw things at their times and then expressed themselves. For instance in Matt. 12:42 we read that the Queen of the South came from ἐκ τῶν περάτων τῆς γῆς. In I Kings 10:1 we learn that Sheba came from 1000 miles away in SW Arabia. Of course SW Arabia was not and is not the “ends of the earth” technically, and yet that expression conveys the idea of “from far away” which indeed was true. So we are looking at a figure of speech, a hyperbole contextualized.

The law of context is good to review in this study. Context is the total setting of a verse or paragraph. One investigates the preceding and following verses. One looks at the preceding and following paragraphs to see the meaning. There is an immediate context and a remote context of a book and historical setting. One even considers the relationship of the book to other books and to the Testament. It is the delightfully same old tried and true story of Scripture interprets Scripture. And what a safe and rewarding path this is.

### **HOW WOULD YOU TREAT THESE?**

- I Thess. 1:8 ἐν παντί τόπῳ For sure in Macedonia and Achaia as the Word spread throughout, the example of Christians like the Thessalonians was also told. But literally “everywhere”?
- Rom. 1:8 ἐν ὅλῳ τῷ κόσμῳ. “Your faith is proclaimed (pres. Pass καταγγέλλεται) in all the world.” It is an ongoing thing, as the Gospel spreads, the witnesses of

faith also exclaim what they have seen among Christians. This is going all over. Had this gone to the literal “whole world”?

- II Tim. 4:17 και ἀκούσῃ πάντα τὰ ἔθνη· Here we have a ἵνα clause with two verbs in the subjunctive (πληροφορηθῆ και ἀκούσῃ). It was God’s purpose, not an accomplished result. Paul was to preach wherever he went. While the Word was to spread far and wide, had every last nation of the Gentiles heard?
- Eph. 3:9 φωτίσαι πάντας Wherever Paul went he was to seek to enlighten. But would Paul reach all men?
- Acts 19:10 ὥστε πάντας τοὺς κατοικοῦντας τὴν Ἀσίαν ἀκοῦσαι Yes, Paul did work for going on three years in that region. Was this more of a constative idea, that it was being done as you looked over Asia far and wide, or had it been done with no exceptions?
- Acts 19:17 ἐγένετο γνωστὸν πᾶσιν Here is another example close by. Was the telling of the humiliation of Sceva’s sons being spread through the city or did every last one of the inhabitants of Ephesus know?

While in a couple of these the Greek grammar would allow for an understanding of “extensive but not all inclusive” (Rom. 1:8 καταγγέλλεται a pres. Pass, II Tim 4:17 a ἵνα clause), still how would we explain the others? We would not want to be the naïve literalist on the one hand nor the skeptical, allegorizing liberal on the other. What we want to recognize is that there are figures of speech, in this case hyperbole, that simply have to be recognized. In the previous passages we see hyperbole in context, and extensiveness but not necessarily an all inclusiveness. Hyperbole emphasizes something. These should make our eyes light up and our mouth to exclaim, “Praise the Lord!”

#### MATTHEW 24:14

We have ἐν ὅλῃ τῇ οἰκουμένῃ εἰς μαρτύριον πᾶσι τοῖς ἔθνεσι which is a prophecy become a command κηρυχθήσεται. This Gospel of the kingdom will be preached throughout the whole world ἐν ὅλῃ τῇ οἰκουμένῃ, as a testimony to all nations; and then the end will come. The end could come at any time as the Gospel had gone out. The church realized this. It was extensive, but not all inclusive.

This became the overarching thrust of the NT church then and now.

But how do we know it is not hyperbole? It is in an announcement by our Lord which He voiced also in the Great Commission. A casual perusal of several verses shows that it is the overarching thrust and command of the NT.

- Acts 1:8 ἕως ἐσχάτου τῆς γῆς.
- Mt. 28:19 μαθητεύσατε πάντα τὰ ἔθνη
- Mk. 16:15 εἰς τὸν κόσμον ἅπαντα κηρύξατε τὸ εὐαγγέλιον πάσῃ τῇ κτίσει.
- Lk. 24:47 κηρυχθῆνα... εἰς πάντα τὰ ἔθνη

As membership of the first century church showed by their witnessing they understood it not to be just a figure of speech. This fits the rest of Scripture and its parts, the analogy of Scripture. Mt., Mk., Lk., and Jn. All have the overarching proclamation toward the end of their Gospels. Acts records the progress to a point in history. The epistles show further the extensiveness of His expanding rule.

#### ROMANS 10:18

...εἰς πᾶσαν τὴν γῆν ἐξήλθεν ὁ φθόγγος αὐτῶν καὶ εἰς τὰ πέρατα τῆς οἰκουμένης τὰ ῥήματα αὐτῶν. However you take the aorist (ingressive, constative, effective), still it is a matter of extensive, but not all inclusive. The “ends of the earth” (γῆς in Mt. 12:42, οἰκουμένης in Rom. 10:18) it is hyperbolic. More evidence is adduced.

Paul quotes Ps. 19:4 which is nature announcing our God, disclosing Him in part but everywhere. Further, how have people heard this? Wherever the Jews went in any empire (Babylonian, Persian, Greek, Roman) the message for instance in Psalms went. As far as the Jews were, so were the Scriptures. Paul quotes Ps. 19:4 in the context of dispersed Israel. Of course even the diaspora of Israel was not literally in all the inhabited world. In Timbuktu perhaps, But with the Maori?

In Romans Paul contextualizes the hyperbole. In Rom. 15:20 he states his desire to preach not where Christ has already been named building on another's foundation. (Earlier he stated this goal in II Cor. 10:15-16.) he sees in Spain such a field evidently . vv. 24, 28 If Romans was written sometime between 56-58 and Colossians in 62 during

his first imprisonment, knowing what we know, he would have had to go to Spain after he wrote both of these passages. There are though those who think Paul could have gone to Spain in 61 before prison.

#### COLOSSIANS 1:6

The glad tidings were spreading, καὶ ἐν παντὶ τῷ κόσμῳ, καὶ ἔστι καρποφορούμενον. With the present tense ἔστι this is an ongoing thing. A.T. Robertson says the Gospel was spreading all over the Greek world and the Roman empire. Here he says we have a “legitimate hyperbole.”

Moule, (for Col. 1:23) “let it be heard in all the great centers of the empire.” Lenski says that this is a popular hyperbole. The Gospel “is planted far and wide, “ that it has a “world-wide reach” and that it is “ever progressing, never stopping with any nation or country.”

#### COLOSSIANS 1:23

...τοῦ κηρυχθέντος ἐν πάσῃ τῇ κτίσει τῇ ὑπὸ τὸν οὐρανόν. Here we have the aorist which is the special tense that is interpreted according to context. κηρυχθέντος is an aorist pass. part. I take it as constative, giving a far flung, wide picture of what is going on. The hyperbole ...πάσῃ lends itself to this broad picture.

#### CONCLUSION

We are to take a passage in its normal, literal sense unless the context indicates otherwise. In the wider consideration than just with the immediate words applying the law of context we see these verses properly. There was a time in church history when Christians in Europe thought and taught that the Gospel had gone into all the world and that there was no need for missions anymore after the time of the apostles. Some extended this beyond the first century. Read of Carey’s struggle with the Baptists and of Baron von Wetz’ with the Lutherans. Their opponents had lost the overarching thrust of the first century. Back when many thought the Great Commission applied to the apostles only and they had fulfilled it, certainly the misinterpretation of Col. 1:6, 23 and Rom. 10:18 could support that false conclusion.