

534 The Gentile Sea

As we considered last time, even God's "foolishness" is far higher and wiser than the highest possible "wisdom" of Man. This great gulf between God's ways and Man's ways is shown so clearly in the period of Jesus' "passion", from His entry into Jerusalem as Messiah and King, to His betrayal, illegal trial and gruesome death as the One "accursed" by His Father, and on to the joyful wonders of His resurrection. It is of course by God's "foolish" but gracious ways and thoughts, so at odds with worldly assumptions, that now, "justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Romans 5.1).

In Matthew's Gospel, first and foremost the Jewish Gospel, there is a strong emphasis on Galilee for Jesus' post-resurrection period (eg., Matthew 28.7, 10, 16a). Galilee is also the setting for the wonderful episode in John Chapter 21, of the fruitless night of fishing on "the sea of Tiberias", followed by the great catch of fish and breakfast with Jesus on the shore. The use of the Roman word "Tiberias" here, rather than "Galilee", suggested to the biblical chronologers Ware and Paine (* see end) that this episode, the eighth "sign miracle" given in John's Gospel, has underlying "typical" significance for the mainly Gentile-based "Church Age".

For brevity's sake we can mention here only a few of the features of this passage to which Ware and Paine drew typological attention. First, often in Scripture the "sea" represents the restless Gentile nations, and the surprising absence of any fish caught from that sea during the night can refer to the first three years of "the Church Age" when no "Gentile fish" were caught in the "Gospel net" because Peter and his colleagues, in disobedience to Jesus' command (eg., Acts 1.8 end), were still preaching only to the Jews. This abruptly changed in Acts 10 when visitors arrived in Joppa asking for Peter and the Spirit told him, "Arise therefore, and get thee down, and go with them, doubting nothing: for I have sent them". Gentile Cornelius and his household duly received the Holy Spirit and were baptised (10.19-48).

Then, in John 21.6, at Jesus' instruction the net was cast, not on the usual left side but "on the right side of the ship" – the "right side" in scriptural context representing power and authority, as in Psalm 110.1, quoted in Matthew 22.44. The Gospel net was cast there by seven "fishers of men" (Matthew 4.19 / John 21.2,6) into the "Gentile sea", and a "multitude of fishes" was caught. With much effort the net was dragged

to the shore, “full of great fishes”, 153 of them, “yet was not the net broken” (21.11).

Ah ha! Whenever particular numbers are mentioned in Scripture, be they referring to dates, timespans, distances or amounts, these numbers with their various “factors” may well hold beneath-the-surface significance. Using the “gematria” of these words (that is, adding up the number associated with each Greek letter within each word or phrase), the following beautiful truths came to light. The figure of 153 is attained by $(7+10) \times 9$, where, scripturally, 7 denotes spiritual perfection, 10 denotes numerical completion, and 9 denotes finality. The number 153 can thus apply to the completed Church at the time of its “rapture”, when every one of its Gentile members, (“the fulness of the Gentiles”, from Romans 11.25), will be safely brought to “the shore” of heaven.

What is more, the gematria total for the Greek words translated as “the net” is 1224, a figure which is attained by 153×8 . Scripturally, 8 of course denotes resurrection, (the gematria of “Jesus” in the Greek is 888!), so here in John 21 the figure of 1224, “the net”, praise God, speaks of not one fish within that unbroken net being lost at the resurrection of the completed Church at the Rapture.

In returning now to Matthew’s Gospel as we close this time, we note that there is no mention of Jesus’ ascension. This must arise from this Gospel’s strong Jewish focus, in which Jesus is seen herein primarily as Messiah, Son of David and King of the coming Kingdom. As such, the intervening, time-limited, Gentile-based “Church Age” period, in which Jesus is seen more as Saviour and Lord rather than as Messiah, has, strictly speaking from the Jewish standpoint, little relevance. Hence Jesus’ ascension is not mentioned, and when He returns as promised in glory at the end of the tribulation for His original covenant people (eg., Matthews 24.29-31), in biblical chronological terms the Church Age will be omitted, so that from the Jewish perspective He will never have been away at all.

“O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God!
How unsearchable [are] his judgments, and his ways past finding out!”
(Romans 11.33).

We praise Him, through our risen, ascended and glorified Lord.

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(* Details of four helpful books on these matters, by E W Bullinger, Arthur Ware, Frank Paine and Jonathan Hill, are shown on the This Week page of the website)