

THE PARTICIPATION OF THE GENTILES IN THE MESSIANIC KINGDOM ACCORDING TO MATTHEW

The Gentiles are a special class to themselves, whose reaction to Jesus deserves special note. In fact, although Matthew mentions none among Jesus' regular disciples or enemies, because His mission was principally to "the lost sheep of the house of Israel," he does purposely include numerous mentions of them all in a favorable sense. The only significant negative Gentile personages are Pontius Pilate and his wife who figure in Jesus' trials, and while not pictured as particularly believers, both underline Jesus' innocence in different ways (27:18, 19, 24). Pilate's final decision to protect himself rather than an innocent man, needs no comment. The soldiers of the battalion that mocked Jesus (27:27-31) are negative, minor figures as are also the soldiers at the tomb who became involuntary witnesses to the reality of Jesus' resurrection (27:62-66; 28:11-15).

Consider, however, the following positive, deliberately apologetic instances Matthew included to show that the Messianic Kingdom, rightly understood, is open to everyone, regardless of birth, race, language or national background:

1. At least three of the four women mentioned in Jesus' genealogy are Gentiles: Rahab the Canaanite (Josh. 2:11; Heb. 11:31); Ruth the Moabitess (Ruth 1:16f.; 2:12); Bathsheba the wife of Uriah the Hittite (II Sam. 11; I Kings 15:5). The Messiah cannot be a pure-blood Hebrew: He is part pagan by unquestionable genealogy.
2. The adoration by the Magi, standing in stark contrast to the indifference of Jerusalem and the clergy and the suspicions of a murderous king, points to a Messiah whose mission concerns not only Israel, but all peoples (2:1-12).
3. John the Baptist preached: "God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham" and insisted that repentance and righteousness are the essential qualities for participation in the Messianic Kingdom (3:1-10). If fleshly descent from Abraham is clearly subordinate to spiritual kinship to Abraham through faith and obedience to God, then, the logical conclusion may well be that even non-Hebrews will be permitted to share in the Messianic Kingdom on this same basis.
4. The universality of the Messiah's ministry is underlined by Matthew's quotation of Isaiah 9:1, 2 linking Jesus' ministry in "Galilee of the Gentiles" with the already well-attested prophecy that

had already sung of God's concern for the benighted pagans (4:12-17).

5. Remarkable for its absence in all of Jesus' teaching is any blessing of Israel above all other nations, any special honor given to uniquely Jewish practices, rites or customs; circumcision.
6. Unhesitatingly, Jesus blessed and praised the Gentile centurion of Capernaum and unblushingly stated Gentile participation in the Kingdom banquet to the exclusion of privileged Jews (8:5-13).
7. The account of the Syro-phoenician woman—herself a CANAANITE—underlines most vigorously the high quality of the faith of Gentiles when once brought into living contact with Christ and His message.
8. The participation of a half-Jewish, half-pagan population of Decapolis at the second miraculous multiplication of food, subtly underlines their common participation at the Messianic banquet (15:29-39; cf. Mark 7:31; 8:1-10).
9. In the parable of the wicked husbandmen, Jesus affirms: "The Kingdom of God will be taken away from you (Jewish leaders especially) and given to a nation producing the fruits of it" (21:43). The new nation would not be merely Gentile, but a new people of Gentile-Jewish extraction who love and serve Jesus.
10. In the parable of the marriage feast, the King, angered by those who were invited and had rejected His invitation, destroyed those murderers and burned their city, because "they were unworthy," and ordered His servants to bring in just anyone they could find (22:1-14). The evident allusion is to the destruction of Jerusalem and the privileged Jews who should have been most ready to accept God's invitation. Nevertheless, the non-Jews are offered the same privileges, but must not presume upon God's grace. (Cf. Rom. 11:22.)
11. "This gospel of the kingdom will be preached throughout the whole world, as a testimony to all nations" (24:14)!
12. The Judgment of Christ, at which all nations will be gathered, separated and judged, will be settled, not on the basis of one's Jewishness, but on the basis of each one's usefulness in helping "the least of Christ's brethren" (25:31-46).
13. The kindness of Mary of Bethany in anointing Jesus for His burial "will be told in memory of her, wherever this gospel is preached in the whole world" (26:13).

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14. Pilate's wife was the only voice urgently raised to protest Jesus' innocence at His trial before the Gentile court.
15. A Gentile centurion at the crucifixion is the only non-disciple quoted by Matthew as having made a statement favorable to Jesus: "Truly this was God's son" (27:54)!
16. In virtue of Jesus' universal authority, all nations are to be evangelized and discipled (28:18-20).