

32 - A FURTHER MISSIONARY MANDATE

Luke 10:1-16

If we are to believe Luke's itinerary, Jesus sent even more of his followers on ahead of him toward Jerusalem. There is some debate among scholars as to the historical value of this passage. Like so much else in the gospel narratives, we have virtually no verifying evidence one way or the other.

Sharon Ringe is among those who regard it as a recycling with elaboration of a very similar passage in 9:1-6. Yet she does realize that some of the details do fit with the Gentile mission of a later time when the food Jews were permitted to eat was changing as the early church's mission moved into Gentile communities. This suggests that Luke was looking beyond Jesus' time to a time when the mission was to proclaim the Jesus of the gospel to the whole world.

John Dominic Crossan argued persuasively that the story represents a stage of missionary work by the Christian church in the early 2d century. By that time there were significant communities of Christians resident in various cities of the Roman empire as well as groups of itinerant missionaries who traveled widely. They went in pairs, as Paul had often done, and asked for hospitality of resident Christians wherever they preached. ("Jesus And The Kingdom: Itinerants and Householders in

This is an anomaly in what Luke reported Jesus to have said. The naming of Bethsaida and

Earliest Christianity." in Borg, Marcus J. *Jesus At 2000*. Westview Press, 1997.)

As the story stands before us, there are many reasons to accept it as a valid description of what might have happened as Jesus made his way to Jerusalem. He sent out these seventy "others" to prepare for his passing through the places where he would go. (Cf. "Seventy elders" appointed by Moses in Exodus 24:1) Sometimes they would be well received; other times, openly rejected as he had been in Samaria. They were to concentrate on individual households, not hold mass meetings as had occurred in Galilee. Whether received or rejected they were to tell the people that "the kingdom had come near to you." The people's response would determine whether or not they were to condemn those who would not receive them. In this instance, the missionaries were given the authority to speak in Jesus' name with eternal consequences.

The reference to Sodom recalled a terrifying incident from the patriarchal age when Abraham's brother Lot and his extended family were warned to flee from the destruction of the region near the Dead Sea (Genesis 19:24-28). Tyre and Sidon were included in what appears as a strange tirade by Jesus. They were two notorious pagan cities on the Mediterranean seacoast northeast of Galilee.

Choraizin extended the anomaly further. These were two towns north of Lake Galilee. They were

nowhere near any of the routes to Jerusalem that Jesus might have taken. It is possible that Luke made the tradition fit his plan for the journey. Or it could be that the actual journey had not yet begun. The most we can say is that the story has some serious difficulties.