

The Word of the Lord is beautiful and enlightening is it not? The Psalmist rejoiced in its beauty:

Psa 19:7 The Law of Jehovah is perfect, converting the soul; the testimony of Jehovah is sure, making the simple wise.

Psa 19:8 The Precepts of Jehovah are right, rejoicing the heart; the Commandments of Jehovah are pure, giving light to the eyes.

Psa 19:11 And Your servant is warned by them; in keeping them there is great reward.

We rejoice in the testimony of our Lord given us through Paul in his post Acts ministry. My prayer is that you are enjoying this series concerning the differences in our Apostle Paul and you are inspired to study your Bibles with continuing vigour.

This lesson we begin to consider the major differences in Paul's Apostleship to the Gentiles during the Acts period and afterwards. Let us revisit his commissions, his own statements about his ministry and Scriptures which relate to these things. Firstly, during the Acts period, Paul was the Apostle of the Gentiles:

Act 9:15 But the Lord said to him, Go! For this one is a chosen vessel to Me, to bear My name before nations and kings and the sons of Israel.

Rom 11:13 For I speak to you, the nations; since I am the apostle of the nations, I glorify my ministry;

The God of Israel's fathers (Acts 22:14) had separated Paul from his mother's womb (Gal.1:15). This strong link between the God who called Paul and the nation of Israel is important. After Acts 28 no mention is made of God being associated with Israel's fathers.

Paul was the Apostle to the Gentiles during Acts but he was also commissioned to speak to Kings and the children of Israel. Paul's ministry during Acts was not exclusively to the nations. Let us confirm this from the Acts records and Paul's own words.

Soon after Paul's conversion we find him preaching the Lord in the synagogues of Damascus and Jerusalem. His first ministry was to the Jews exclusively, in other words, no Gentiles heard Paul in his early ministry years;

Act 9:19 And taking food, *he* was strengthened. And Saul was certain days with the disciples in Damascus.

Act 9:20 And immediately he proclaimed Christ in the synagogues, that He is the Son of God.

Act 9:22 But Saul increased the more in strength and confounded the Jews who lived at Damascus, proving that this One is the Christ.

Act 9:28 And he was with them, coming in and going out in Jerusalem.

Act 9:29 And he spoke boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus, and argued with the Hellenists (Greek speaking Jews). But they seized him in order to kill him.

Now look carefully at Paul's account where he says he was obedient to the heavenly vision and the commission given him on the road to Damascus:

Act 26:19 After this, king Agrippa, I did not disobey the heavenly vision.

Act 26:20 But to those **first** in Damascus, and Jerusalem, and to all the country of Judea, **and to the nations**, I made known the command to repent and to turn to God, doing works worthy of repentance.

Notice Paul went to the Jews first and this is a very critical difference in Paul's ministries because after Acts 28 the Jews had no dispensational advantage and Paul ministered to all nations without distinction or priority.

Paul returned to his home country at the close of Acts 9 (v30) and is not featured in the Acts' records until chapter 11 (v25) where another important statement is made as to the direction of the witness:

Act 11:19 Then, indeed, they who were scattered abroad by the persecution that rose about Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch, preaching the Word to no one except the Jews.

Despite the fact that Peter had "opened the door to the Gentiles" in Acts 10, the witness remained directed at the nation of Israel only, but now it was reaching out to those of the dispersion; the Jews outside the land. Peter preached to a Gentile inside the land and then the message moved to the Jews outside the land. From Acts 13 onwards the message to the Jews outside the land, as recorded in Acts, was mostly through Paul the Apostle to the Gentiles. Can we see the Jew first in the order of these events?

During the Acts period Peter was an apostle of the circumcision but preached to a Gentile and Paul was an apostle to the un-circumcision but preached to the Jews.

Now if we are not careful here, we will follow the traditional error and believe that the church which is His Body started at that time because Jews and Gentiles were receiving salvation. The inclusion of Gentiles or nations into salvation during the Acts period does not mean our calling began or later truth was gradually revealed.

The first thing we need to recall is that it was never a mystery that Gentiles would be included in salvation. When Israel was given the Law it was to be applied equally to the strangers (Gentiles) who had chosen to live among them Ex.12:48-49, Lev.24:22 and Num.15:15-16.

Historically, God had reached out to Gentiles so it should not surprise us that Paul was sent to them. Jonah had witnessed to gentiles, and the Lord recounts two other historic ministries to gentiles in his denunciation of the Jews in His home town as recorded in Luke 4:24-27.

Historically Gentiles had been included into salvation and blessing through Israel who enjoyed the prior position as God's chosen people. This is precisely the case during the Acts period. It was Jew first, then the Gentile cp Roms.2:9, 10.

The inclusion of the Gentiles into salvation and blessing with Israel was not only proclaimed through historic precedent but was clearly foretold in the prophets. Let me put this the other way around. The prophets spoke of salvation coming to the nations and so the addition of gentiles into the assemblies during the Acts period was not the beginning of "the church" or our present dispensation of grace. Prophecy and The Mystery of Ephesians 3 are not to be mixed.

As we have observed, it was actually Peter who introduced the gospel to the Nations in the Acts period as recorded in Acts 10-11:18. Here is James' explanation of the event in Acts 15:

Act 15:7 And after much disputing, Peter rose up and said to them, Men, brothers, you recognize that from ancient days God chose among us that through my mouth the nations should hear the Word of the gospel, and believe.

Act 15:14 Even as Simon has declared how God at the first visited the nations to take out of them a people for His name.

Act 15:15 And the words of the Prophets agree to this; as it is written,

Act 15:16 "After this I will return and will build again the tabernacle of David which has fallen down; and I will build again its ruins, and I will set it up,

Act 15:17 so those men who are left might seek after the Lord, and all the nations on whom My name has been called, says the Lord, who does all these things."

The inclusion of the Gentiles during the Acts period was in harmony with prophecy and thus the Jew and Gentile company of that time could not be the church which is His body of the post Acts ministry of Paul.

Now what about Paul, the Apostle of the Gentiles during Acts, what did he write regarding the inclusion of the Gentiles during that time?

Act 13:46 But speaking boldly, Paul and Barnabas said, It was necessary for the Word of God to be spoken to **you first**. But **since indeed you put it far from you** and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, **we turn to the nations**.

Act 13:47 For so the Lord has commanded us, saying, "I have set You to be a light of the nations, for salvation to the end of the earth."

The Lord commanded Paul to turn to the Nations but notice it was Jew first and Paul's authority to turn to the Gentiles is given from Isaiah 49. Paul is not sent to the Gentiles during Acts with the Mystery of Ephesians 3 else we should find it in Isaiah. Please observe the priority of the Jews in this prophetic passage, the inclusion of the Gentiles is secondary.

Prophecy and Acts are in perfect harmony:

Isa 49:5 And now, says Jehovah who formed Me from the womb to be His servant, to bring Jacob again to Him, Though Israel is not gathered, yet I shall be glorious in the eyes of Jehovah, and My God shall be My strength.

Isa 49:6 And He said, It is but a little thing that You should be My servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to bring back the preserved ones of Israel; I will also give You for a light to the nations, to be My salvation to the end of the earth.

I highlighted important words and phrases from Acts 13:46-47 and it is critical we now focus on one of them:

Act 13:46 But speaking boldly, Paul and Barnabas said, It was necessary for the Word of God to be spoken to you first. But **since indeed you put it far from you** and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, **we turn to the nations**.

As we have seen from Paul's own words, he was not disobedient to the heavenly vision and preached to Jews first and AFTER they had rejected the message THEN the gospel of the promise made to the Fathers (Acts 13:32) is given to the Nations in that locality. This precedent had already been established earlier in the Acts through Peter, remember?

Peter preached to a Gentile in the land after Israel in the land had rejected the message. The unconverted Saul was wreaking havoc on the faithful, Saul was the instrument of Israel's rejection and despite the fact he was converted in Acts 9, he represented the national hardness against the gospel. This national hardness was manifested by the murder of Stephen in Acts 7 and the murder of others during that time (Acts 26:10-11). Peter preached to a gentile in the land after these events, after Israel had rejected the Lord's message and messengers.

Thus it is no surprise to find in Acts 13 Paul turning to Gentiles after Israel outside the land rejected the message as well.

To sum up this lesson we find Paul's ministry to the Gentiles during the Acts period was;

1. Anticipated historically.
2. Foretold by the Prophets.
3. Secondary to his ministry to Israel.
4. Initiated after the rejection of the message by the Jews in specific locations.

None of these things can be found as instrumental in Paul's post Acts ministry. Indeed, they are so powerfully and obviously different that we are amazed they are not more widely acknowledged. Perhaps tradition is a more blinding than we realize. We have been taught for so long that the church started in the Gospels or Pentecost that for some it is difficult to see these differences.

Next lesson we shall see why the Gentiles were included in salvation during the Acts period. We shall find this to be another incredible difference in Paul's ministries during Acts and after Acts.