

BIBLE EXPLORATIONS

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...to know the love of Christ
which passeth knowledge
that ye might be filled with
all the fulness of God. Eph 3:19

Division of Nations

"And the Lord said, Behold the people is one, and they have all one language ..." (Ge 11:6)

After the flood, in Noah's day, families grew into tribes and tribes increased making nations until there were seventy nations upon the earth. Genesis 10 lists those seventy, saying then, **"These are the families of the sons of Noah, after their generations, in their nations..."** Here, nations is the Hebrew word "goyim", a plural noun, also translated Gentiles, heathen, and people. It carries the idea of massing together. It is used here of all the nations on the earth, but later in Scripture it is used of all those nations outside of one nation called Israel. It is also used of individuals from those nations outside of Israel.

God had blessed Noah and his sons after the flood and told them to be fruitful, multiply, and fill the earth. He gave them inheritance upon the earth. (Deut 32:8) However, in defiance of God, instead of dispersing and filling the earth, the people gathered together in the area which was later called Babylonia. They left off living in temporary dwellings and began to make buildings of brick for permanent settlements. They attempted to set up a government and religious system without God. Forsaking Him, they adopted astrology and worshipped the creation. Seeing this, God said, **"... now nothing will be restrained from them, which they have imagined to do"**. (Ge 11:6)

Centuries later, the Apostle Paul

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wrote about the apostasy and downfall of those nations. He said that they: **"...when they knew God, they glorified Him not as God, neither were thankful; ... Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and four-footed beasts, and creeping things ... who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature (creation) more than the Creator"**. (Ro 1:21-25)

Along with the idolatry of the nations came immorality, a principle seen constantly thereafter in Scripture. Those who knew God, but turned from Him to idols, became so wicked that God gave them up to uncleanness; He gave them up unto vile affections; and gave them over to their own wrong thinking to do unfruitful acts. (Ro 1:24-28) Because of their wickedness, God scrambled their language so that they could not understand one another's speech, and He scattered them throughout the earth. (Ge 11:7,8)

But, in spite of this, even then, God had a plan for those scattered people. He would create one new nation to be His priests and evangelists to those nations. And so He called out Abram and revealed to him that He would make, out of his children, that one nation. (Ge 12:1-3)

Where there had been oneness among the people on earth, now there was a division because of

God's purpose. Where there had been seventy unified nations, now there was the one nation separate from the nations.

The nations (Gentiles) would continue in their ways apart from God, but Israel would have God's presence with them and that would distinguish them from the rest of the nations. One of Israel's leaders recognized this when he said to God, **"For wherein shall it be known here that I and Thy People have found grace in Thy sight? Is it not in that Thou goest with us? So shall we be separated, I and Thy People (Israel), from all the people that are upon the face of the earth"**. (Ex 33:16)

God told Israel to live separate from the rest of the nations (heathen) and to be holy, set apart for Him. He gave them instructions for worship and for every aspect of life. They looked different from those of the nations and they acted differently. God called them His sons and He dealt with them as sons being prepared for the service which He planned for them.

The distinction between the Gentiles and Israel, between individuals in the nations and those in Israel, is seen in Scripture from Genesis 12 to the end of Acts, from about 1946 BC to 64 AD. It is seen when God said to Israel, **"I will also give Thee for a light to the Gentiles"** (nations). (Isa 49:6) Jews understood this, for centuries later Paul said the same thing in Acts 13:47. Israel was also told that if they would

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Divine Summons #5

Summons to Individuals: Saul, Called Paul

Saul of Tarsus received more than one divine summons to service. God called him first when he was a zealous young Pharisee, persecuting and imprisoning Jews who had embraced Jesus. On the road to Damascus, while pursuing some of that sect, suddenly, out of heaven, a brilliant light flashed round about Saul. With that, the Lord got Saul's attention. He revealed Himself to Saul as Jesus, the risen Messiah of Israel.

From God's spokesman Ananias, Saul learned that he was a chosen vessel to bear God's name before nations, before kings, and before the Children of Israel. (Ac 9:15) Saul was a vessel well prepared for ministries to such diverse groups. His upbringing in the Gentile city of Tarsus gave him a knowledge of the Greek language and literature which was common there. His Roman citizenship and understanding of Rome's law gave him ability to speak to kings. And, his Hebrew lineage, religious upbringing, and study of the Torah, enabled him to speak to Jews with confidence.

Paul wrote later that God, "... **separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by His grace, to reveal His Son in me.**" (Gal 1:15,16) He said a dispensation was committed unto him (1 Cor 9:16,17); he was "... **put in trust with the gospel**". (1 Thes 2:4)

Paul faithfully preached that gospel of Jesus, the Messiah, Who had risen, ascended, and was com-

ing again. He preached it to Jews only for nine years, but then, after a revelation from God, he began to preach that gospel with special grace to Gentiles. (Gal 1:12,16) Paul preached God's grace to Gentiles in that they could be grafted into Israel's kingdom and blessings, without being circumcised and without keeping the law of Moses. Paul said, "... **the gospel of the uncircumcision was committed unto me, as the gospel of the circumcision was unto Peter**". (Gal 2:7) Both gospels had the hope of Israel's king and kingdom.

With some others at that time, Paul's summons was to be a minister of the New Covenant, that covenant which God promised to Israel and Judah. (2 Cor 3:6; Jer 31:31) Paul announced that covenant, saying that he declared the whole council of God. (Ac 20:27) He preached all that he knew of God's mind at that time. (He said nothing about Messiah's Headship over a family to dwell far above all heavens.)

Paul was called to be a steward of the mysteries (secrets) of God. (1 Cor 4:1,2) He received an abundance of revelations from God during that period in which he preached Messiah's return for Israel's kingdom. (2 Cor 12:7) God gave Paul truth as it was needed for believers then. Some questioned the time and manner of Messiah's return. Some wondered about the resurrection of saints who died before Messiah came. Some questioned what sort of bodies they would have in resurrection. God revealed the

secrets of those things to Paul, for the sake of those saints. (1 Cor 15:51; 1 Thes 4:13-5:3)

Humanly speaking, Saul had all one could wish for when he received his first divine summons. He was a rich cosmopolitan man, an intellectual, and a religious leader in his country. He left that all behind when he heard Messiah's call. He suffered indescribable physical and mental pain because of his love for Jesus, the Messiah, and for teaching the truths which God gave to him.

After 27 years ministering to Gentiles, to kings, and to the Children of Israel, all of Paul's labors appeared to be for nothing. He had preached to Jews scattered throughout the world, with little success. Even while a prisoner in Rome, he had spoken to the Jewish leaders there about the Messiah and the hope of Israel, but to no avail. (Ac 28:17-27) It must have been one of the blackest times in Paul's life, for he realized his nation had refused their Messiah-King, and he knew of no other hope.

But then in the darkest of times, Paul received another divine summons. God had told Paul earlier that he was to be a minister and a witness "... **both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee**". (Ac 26:16) And the Lord did come again to Paul in prison and He entrusted Paul with a gospel which He had kept hidden in Himself and hidden from ages and generations. (Eph 3:9; Col 1:26)

J. Heltzinger

Divine Summons #6

Summons to Individuals: Saul, Called Paul, Continued

The Apostle Paul received his first divine summons when he was known as Saul, the zealous young Pharisee, who persecuted and imprisoned followers of Jesus. On the road to Damascus, Jesus appeared to Saul and called him to preach to nations, to kings, and to the Children of Israel. (Ac 9:15) Without hesitation, Saul answered that call and began to preach the gospel, that Jesus, the Messiah, was risen, ascended, and coming again for Israel's kingdom.

Paul preached that good news to Jews only for nine years, then to Jews and Gentiles for 18 years. He endured great hardships to carry that message to Jews scattered throughout Asia, Cilicia, and Macedonia. But all his efforts seemed to be in vain for few believed his gospel.

Then, after 27 years of faithfully preaching Israel's hope with little success, the Lord gave Paul some shocking news to announce. God said that He had sent Israel's Salvation, (Jesus, the Messiah) to the nations. (Ac 28:28)

Hearing that news, surely Paul was not only discouraged but now he was also confused. Paul knew that God had given up the nations at Babel and called Israel to be His ministers to them. He knew that no one but Israel was promised a Messiah-King. True, he had seen individual Gentiles grafted into Israel's hope, but what would Messiah do among the nations now that Israel's kingdom was not in view?

The Lord did not leave His servant, Paul, perplexed. He came to him in Rome and summoned him to make known a plan which He had kept secret in Himself, hidden from ages and generations (Eph 3:9, Col 1:26). Paul learned that, before the founda-

tion of the world, God had chosen a body of believers to be with the Messiah when He is glorified, far above all heavens, where He will be honored as Head over all beings in earth, heaven, and heavenly places. (Eph 1:4)

Paul had known that, before the foundation of the world, God foreknew that his creation would need a Saviour and so He had determined that Jesus, the Messiah, would be the Lamb slain for sin. (1 Pet 1:18) Paul had known that the Father had loved the Messiah before the foundation of the world. (Jn 17:24) However, Paul did not know that God had a purpose for men which He planned before the foundation of the world. Paul said, "**Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery (secret) which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God**". (Eph 3:8,9)

Paul wrote that it pleased God to call faithful saints, out of all nations, to be holy and without blemish in the righteousness of Christ. (Eph 1:4-9) Paul revealed that, in God's mind, those saints are already risen and seated in heavenly places with Messiah, ready for His kindness in the ages to come. (Eph 2:4-7)

Paul said that this message was given to him to dispense (Eph 3:2), that the mystery he preached was: "**... the gospel. Whereof I was made a minister**" (Eph 3:7); "**... The glorious gospel of the blessed God, which was committed to my trust**" (1 Ti 1:11); "**... the gospel. Whereunto I am appointed a preacher, and an apostle, and a teacher of the Gentiles.**" (2 Tim 1:10,11)

To saints out of all nations includ-

ing Israel, those called to be members of the church which is Christ's body, Paul said he was: "**... made a minister, according to the dispensation of God which is given to me for you, to fulfill (complete) the word of God; even the mystery which has been hid from ages and from generations... which is Christ in (among) you, the hope of glory.** (Col 1:25-27) He said, ... (God) **hath in due times manifested His word through preaching, which is committed unto me.**" (Tit 1:3)

Paul was faithful to the vocation to which God summoned him. At his first summons, immediately he turned away from angry pursuit of believers in Jesus, to preach that Jesus was indeed the Messiah, who had risen from the dead and was coming again to Israel. Then, when he was called to make known God's secret purpose for nations, Paul forsook preaching Israel's hope, promises, and blessing. He preached that blessed hope of the Church which is Christ's Body, which is to appear with Him in glory far above all heavens. (Col 3:4)

One might wonder how Paul could turn, without hesitation, from one ministry to another so different. How could he leave behind what was vital in the former work? We see the answer in Paul's move from faith to faith. We realize that it was not merely duty that moved Paul, but his love of God and zeal for God's truth.

At the end of his life Paul could say, "**I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith**". (2 Tim 4:7) May his example give encouragement to all who are summoned and entrusted with the gospel of the Mystery.

In the next issue: Summons to Three Companies.

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How One Became Two ...cont'd

hear and obey Him, "... **the Lord thy God will set thee on high above all nations of the earth**". (Deut 28:1) If they walked contrary to Him, they were told, "... **I will scatter you among the heathen**" (nations). (Lev 26:33)

Jesus, who was a Jew of the tribe of Judah, acknowledged that distinction for He told His Jewish disciples, "... **Go not into the way of the Gentiles ... But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel**". (Mt 10:5,6) He told them not to pray in vain repetition as the heathen (Gentiles) do. (Mt 6:7)

Peter respected the separation of Jews and Gentiles, saying it was unlawful for a Jew to keep company or come unto one of another nation. (Ac 10:28) In addition, Jews were outraged a few years later when they supposed that Paul had taken a Gentile into the Temple. (Ac 21:28,29)

Some Bible teachers have taught that all distinction between Jews and Gentiles was done away with at the time of the cross. They have accused Peter of prejudice and condemned Paul because he continued to observe the Law.

From Paul's letter to the Galatians, (written about AD 52), they have concluded that the differences between

Jews and Gentiles were then abolished. However, the issue there is that all believers have their righteousness in Christ. (Gal 2:16) In Christ, all have forgiveness of sins, "**And by Him all that believe are justified from all things**". (Ac 13:38,39)

Galatians 3:27,28, reads, "**For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There (in Christ) is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.**" All were reckoned to have been baptized into Christ's death and made acceptable to God in Him. Peter acknowledged this commonality when he confessed that, "... **in every nation he that feareth Him and worketh righteousness, is accepted with Him.**" (Ac 10:35)

As to the dispensational position and privileges of believers, there were clearly differences at the time of the Galatian letter. In the assemblies there were males and females and some in bonds and some free, and there was a difference in the Jews' position and the Gentiles' position in God's plans. Jews were of the one nation, created and called by God to bless nations. Gentile believers were only grafts into Israel's

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purpose and blessings. It was only in Abraham, father of the Jewish nation, that Gentiles could find blessing. (Gal 3:29) Gentiles had no promises, no covenants, no Messiah of their own. They were not joint (equal) heirs with those of Israel. They could not claim lands or kingdoms marked out for them. (Eph 2:11,12)

After the flood in Noah's day, there was oneness among the nations on earth, until God made a division. He scattered the nations and created the nation of Israel. Then there became two groups, distinct one from the other, the Gentiles and Israel. God's prophets and apostles acknowledged this distinction between Jews and Gentiles until about AD 64 when God gave the Apostle Paul the revelation of a new plan which He had kept secret within Himself. (Eph 3:8-11) But that is another subject which we will take up later.

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