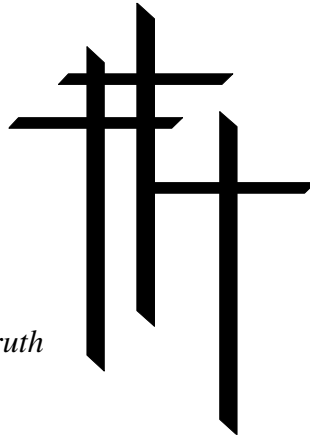


Timely Messenger



*Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth
Speaking the Truth in Love*

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PAUL — AN APOSTLE OF JESUS CHRIST

by Gregg Bing

Continued from last month.

“Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God.”

Last month we began a brief study of the distinctive ministry and apostleship of Paul; a ministry that was clearly not the same as that of the twelve who were apostles before him. We looked at Paul’s dramatic conversion on the road to Damascus, where he was transformed by God’s grace from the chief persecutor of the church to

an apostle of Jesus Christ. Paul was saved by God for a special purpose, but his calling was distinct from that of the Twelve.

Paul’s Distinct Calling

In the first chapter of the book of Acts, the apostle Peter directed the apostles to select a replacement for Judas Iscariot, who had betrayed Jesus. They narrowed the candidates to two and then cast lots to select Matthias. There are some Bible teachers who believe Peter and the other

apostles were wrong for doing this. They insist that Paul was God’s choice to take Judas’ place. Those who hold to this idea fail to see that Paul was called by God for a different purpose than that of the Twelve. Peter understood the number of these apostles must be raised back up to twelve because their ministry was to the twelve tribes of Israel. They began this ministry by going to the Jews in the homeland, starting in Jerusalem and Judea, the capital city and central region of the nation.

Paul was not called by God to take part in the ministry of the Twelve. While he certainly was called to testify before the children of Israel (Acts 9:15), his primary ministry was to be “a preacher, an apostle, and a teacher of the Gentiles” (2 Tim. 1:11). At the time he was saved, this was something new, for up to this point the ministry both of the Lord Jesus and of His apostles had been limited to the Jews only. The only way a Gentile could come to God was as a proselyte, one who had adopted the Jews’ religion

through circumcision (Acts 2:10). Paul was separated by God for the express purpose of preaching Christ among the Gentiles (Gal. 1:15-16).

Since Paul's apostleship was something new, the message he was to preach did not originate with men. Paul wrote to the Galatians:

"But I make known to you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but it came through the revelation of Jesus Christ." (Gal. 1:11-12)

After Paul was saved, he "did not immediately confer with flesh and blood" nor did he "go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles" before him. Instead, he went to Arabia and later returned to Damascus (Gal. 1:17). While Paul was in Arabia, God began to reveal His plan and purpose for Paul's ministry. God did not reveal everything to Paul at this time, for we know Paul

received an abundance of revelations throughout his lifetime (2 Cor. 12:1-7). What is important to see is that Paul did not receive his calling and instructions from men, specifically not from the Twelve, but by direct revelation from Jesus Christ. I believe it is significant that the twelve apostles, who were sent to God's earthly people, Israel, received their calling and commission from the Lord Jesus while He was still here on earth. Whereas, Paul received his calling and commission from the Lord Jesus after He had already ascended back into heaven.

Paul did not visit Jerusalem until three years after he was saved. He met with Peter, but only remained with him for fifteen days. During this time, the only other apostle he saw was James, the Lord's brother (Gal. 1:18-19). While in Jerusalem, the Lord spoke to Paul as he was praying in the temple one day and told him, "Make haste and get out of Jerusalem quickly, for they will not receive your testimony concerning Me. ... Depart,

for I will send you far from here to the Gentiles" (Acts 22:18,21). While the Twelve remained in Jerusalem, even after the persecution and scattering of the Jerusalem church that occurred after the stoning of Stephen (Acts 8:1), the Lord sent Paul away from Jerusalem to minister, instead, to the Gentiles.

Paul spent the next ten years in the regions of Syria and Cilicia, and was "unknown by face" to the believing Jews in Judea. All they knew of Paul was that "he who formerly persecuted them, now preached the faith which he once tried to destroy," and for this, they glorified God (Gal. 1:21-24).

Paul and Barnabas, were then led to go to Antioch in Syria, which became their new home. After a year of ministry in Antioch, these two apostles were sent out by the Holy Spirit to preach the Word in Asia Minor (Acts 13). In each city they visited, they preached the Word first to the Jews, but also to the Gentiles. Paul's ministry to the Gentiles was difficult for the Jews to understand

and accept; not just for the unbelieving Jews, but for the believing Jews as well. When Paul and Barnabas returned from this first journey, certain Jews from Judea came to Antioch and insisted the Gentiles must be circumcised and keep the law in order to be saved, something that Paul and Barnabas strongly disputed (Acts 15:1-2). It was determined that Paul and Barnabas should go up to the apostles and elders in Jerusalem to settle the issue. Luke's account in Acts chapter 15 seems to indicate that the church at Antioch sent Paul and Barnabas to Jerusalem (Acts 15:2-3), but when Paul related this same event to the Galatians, he said, "I went up by revelation." This statement indicates the Lord Jesus revealed to Paul that he was to go to Jerusalem. In this same passage, Paul gave the reason why the Lord sent him to Jerusalem:

"And I went up by revelation, and communicated to them that gospel which I preach among the Gentiles, but

privately to those who were of reputation, lest by any means I might run, or had run, in vain." (Gal. 2:2)

This is another clear indication that Paul's ministry and apostleship, even the gospel he preached, were distinct from that of the Twelve. Many people have trouble accepting the idea that Paul was preaching a different gospel than the Twelve were preaching, but why would Paul need to communicate to them the gospel he preached among the Gentiles if it was the same one being preached by the Twelve to the Jews? The fact is, it was not the same gospel. Paul goes on to say:

"But from those who seemed to be something—whatever they were, it makes no difference to me; God shows personal favoritism to no man—for those who seemed to be something added nothing to me. But on the contrary, when they saw that the gospel for the uncircum-
(Continued on page 4)

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*(Continued from page 3)
cised had been committed to me, as the gospel for the circumcised was to Peter (for He who worked effectively in Peter for the apostleship to the circumcised also worked effectively in me toward the Gentiles), and when James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that had been given to me, they gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised.” (Gal. 2:6-9)*

“Those who seemed to be something” refers to those who had long had the reputation of being apostles and elders, the ones who currently held the leadership roles in the Jerusalem church (specifically James, who was the Lord’s brother, Cephas or Peter, and John). Paul declared of these men: they “added nothing to me.” Paul was not saying they were of no use to him or that he was, in any way, better than they were. He was simply indi-

cating that, in regard to his own ministry, particularly the gospel he preached, these other apostles did not give him any revelation or direction. As Paul shared with these leaders of the Jerusalem church how God was working through him and Barnabas to reach the Gentiles for Christ, they recognized that Paul’s ministry was genuinely of God. It became clear to them that the Lord had given Paul this gospel of grace to preach among the uncircumcised Gentiles, just as they had been given the gospel of the kingdom to preach among the Jews. From the testimony of Paul and Barnabas, it was evident that God was working through these new apostles, just as He was working through the Twelve, but clearly according to different callings. So, James, Peter, and John extended to Paul and Barnabas “the right hand of fellowship,” agreeing that each should continue in the ministry God had sent them to do.

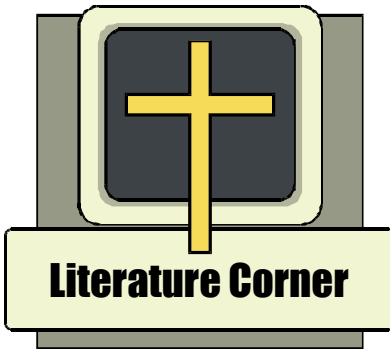
It is vital that we see and understand what James, Peter, and John came to see at the Jerusa-

lem Council—that Paul was given a ministry and apostleship “by the will of God,” but one that was distinct from their own.

We still need to take a closer look at the overall purpose and nature of Paul’s ministry. For instance, while Paul was called of God to be the apostle to the Gentiles, he also had a ministry to the children of Israel. During the Acts period, Paul always went to the Jews first and then to the Gentiles. Why did God send Paul to the Jews first? What was the nature of his ministry to the children of Israel?

After the close of the book of Acts, Paul fully unveiled God’s plan and purpose for a new body of believers, the Church, the Body of Christ, in which the distinction between Jew and Gentile has been removed. This is another aspect of Paul’s apostleship that must be considered. **Next month**, we will continue this study, looking in more detail at

Paul’s Diverse Commission



**A Dispensational Study
of the
BOOK OF ACTS**

by Ike T. Sidebottom

INTRODUCTION

*God's Distinctive
Program for Israel*

In Luke 13:35, we have the following judgment pronounced upon the nation of Israel: "Behold, your house is left unto you desolate: and verily I say unto you, Ye shall not see Me, until the time come when ye shall say, Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord." The "house" in this verse refers to the temple in Jerusalem. The temple had been known as the "Father's house" and is so spoken of by Jesus in John 2:16. However, it is clear from

the above quotation that it was no longer owned as His. It was to be "desolate." Anything that is godless is desolate.

The guilty nation of Israel was remembered by Jesus Christ while He was lifted up on the cross of Calvary. He prayed, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34). This prayer was heard by the Father and the nation of Israel was given another chance. The doom in connection with the judgment which Christ had pronounced upon them was postponed. This is the truth that Christ explained to His people in His post-resurrection message recorded in Luke 24:45-49: "Then opened He their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures, and said unto them, Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And ye are witnesses of these things. And, be-

hold, I send the promise of My Father upon you: but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high."

The promise of the Father has reference to the gift of the Holy Ghost. The pouring out of the Holy Ghost upon Israel was promised through the prophet Isaiah. He said, "Upon the land of My people shall come up thorns and briars; yea, upon all the houses of joy in the joyous city; because the palaces shall be forsaken; the forts and towers shall be for dens for ever, a joy of wild asses, a pasture of flocks; until the Spirit be poured upon us from on high, and the wilderness be a fruitful field, and the fruitful field be counted for a forest." All of this was included in the promise of Christ when He said, "And, behold, I send the promise of My Father upon you."

The rebellious people of Israel rejected the Father and refused to let Him "reign over them" in the days of Samuel (1 Samuel 8:7). The same nation hated Christ and said, "We will not have this man to

reign over us” (Luke 19:14). However, the grace of God is such that this wicked nation could have received the kingdom blessings upon earth if they had only received the message of the Holy Spirit when He came during the book of Acts period according to the promise of the Father, and of the Son. But, just as they had rejected the Father and the Son so they rejected the Holy Spirit when He came on the day of Pentecost. God graciously and patiently dealt with them through the Holy Spirit for a period of thirty years. This thirty year period is covered by the book of Acts.

A chapter by chapter study of the Acts of the Apostles will be of little value unless the student recognizes the scriptural distinction between the Jews, the Gentiles and the church of God (1 Corinthians 10:32). In order to do this, one must carefully apply 2 Timothy 2:15 where we are told to study to show ourselves approved unto God, and become workmen that need

not be ashamed, “rightly dividing the word of truth.” This means that we are not to frustrate the grace of God by endeavoring to mix God’s message to the Jew with His message to the Gentile. We must remember that God committed “the gospel of the uncircumcision” to Paul, and that He committed “the gospel of the circumcision” unto Peter (Galatians 2:7-9). The word “gospel” means good news. God sent good news from heaven to the uncircumcision (Gentiles) through the apostle Paul. In like manner, He sent good news from heaven to the circumcision (Jews) through Peter. These two brethren were made to understand their respective fields of labor, when the Holy Spirit brought them together, moved upon them to extend to each other “the right hands of fellowship” and then go on their respective missions (Galatians 2:9).

Throughout the entire book of Acts, God makes a clear distinction between the Jews and the Gentiles. In the opening chapters of

the book, He directs His message to Jews only, later, He includes the Gentiles, but specifically states that the gospel is the power of God unto salvation “to the Jew first” and also to the Gentile (Romans 1:16). Throughout the entire book the Jews have the advantage. The reason for this is set forth in the question and answer of Romans 3:1-2. We quote: “What advantage then hath the Jew? Or what profit is there of circumcision? Much every way: chiefly, because that unto them were committed the oracles of God.” However, it is clear that their day of advantage passed with the setting aside of national Israel when they made their final rejection of the Holy Spirit and judgment was pronounced upon them according to Acts 28:25-28. They were not set aside when they rejected the Father in the days of Samuel, neither were they set aside when they crucified the Lord of glory; but their house was left unto them desolate when they trampled under foot the message of the Holy Spirit during the

thirty year period of the book of Acts.

Acts 28:28 marks the setting aside of national Israel. As a nation, they must grope in darkness among the nations of the world “until the time come when they shall say, Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord.” When that time comes “all Israel shall be saved: as it is written, There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob: for this is My covenant unto them, when I shall take away their sins” (Romans 11:26-27).

The Christ-rejecting nation of Israel that had to be set aside by the God of glory at the close of the book of Acts, will struggle through the great tribulation that follows the rapture of the church and will be whipped into line by the chastening hand of God in that day of Jacob’s trouble. At the close of the tribulation period God will graciously manifest His grace toward His chosen people again. His promise is, “I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the in-

habitants of Jerusalem, the Spirit of grace and of supplications: and they shall look upon Me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for Him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for Him, as one that is in bitterness for his first-born” (Zechariah 12:10). The same Holy Spirit who plead with Israel for thirty years following the cross and was stubbornly rejected will graciously move in the heart of that down-trodden nation at the end of Jacob’s trouble and will open their blinded eyes and let them behold the One whom they pierced. When they see the nail-pierced Saviour, their hearts will be filled with repentance and made ready for the new covenant blessing.

This time is spoken of by Jeremiah the prophet as follows: “Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah: not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land

of Egypt; which My covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them, saith the Lord: but this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; after those days, saith the Lord, I will put My law in their inward parts and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be My people. And they shall teach no more every man his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for they shall all know Me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the Lord: for I will forgive their iniquity: and I will remember their sin no more” (Jeremiah 31:31-34).

This will be the time when “the Lord also shall roar out of Zion, and utter His voice from Jerusalem; and the heavens and the earth shall shake: but the Lord will be the hope of His people, and the strength of the children of Israel” (Joel 3:16). This will be the time when the Lord Jesus shall fulfill His promise to the twelve as recorded in Luke 22:28-30.

We quote: “Ye are they which have continued with Me in My temptations. And I appoint unto you a kingdom, as My Father hath appointed unto Me; that ye may eat and drink at My table in My kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.” In that day “there shall come people, and the inhabitants of many cities: and the inhabitants of one city shall go to another, saying, Let us go speedily to pray before the Lord, and to seek the Lord of hosts: I will go also. Yea, many people and strong nations shall come to seek the Lord of hosts in Jerusalem, and to pray before the Lord. Thus saith the Lord

of hosts; In those days it shall come to pass, that ten men shall take hold out of all languages of the nations, even shall take hold of the skirt of him that is a Jew, saying, we will go with you: for we have heard that God is with you” (Zechariah 8:20-23).

This will be the time when the Lord shall fulfill His promise: “Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth” (Matthew 5:5). “And the Lord shall be King over all the earth: in that day shall there be one Lord, and His name one” (Zechariah 14:9). This is the King that shall come forth out of the stem of Jesse, “And the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon

Him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord: and shall make Him of quick understanding in the fear of the Lord: and He shall not judge after the sight of His eyes, neither reprove after the hearing of His ears: But with righteousness shall He judge the poor, and reprove with equity for the meek of the earth: and He shall smite the earth with the rod of His mouth, and with the breath of His lips shall He slay the wicked” (Isaiah

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