

THE APOSTLE PAUL AND THE TWELVE APOSTLES

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When the Lord Jesus Christ unexpectedly re appeared from heaven to Saul of Tarsus, (also known as Paul), as is recorded in Acts 9, an event of profound importance took place. The Lord did not simply come back from heaven to save Paul. He did not simply desire to have Paul stop persecuting Him. But rather, the Lord came back from heaven to raise Paul up and commission him as a brand new apostle. The Lord appeared to Paul because as He said in Acts 9:15, this man Paul...

"is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and Kings, and the children of Israel".

Paul was the Lord's "*chosen vessel*". The Lord had a special role for him to fulfill and job for him to do. The Lord had chosen Paul and was commissioning him as an apostle *as a brand new apostle*.

Just why the Lord did this, when He already had 12 apostles functioning, is a question that ought to arise in Christians' minds, and the reason for it definitely needs to be properly understood and appreciated. Unfortunately, though, the understanding that is most often held as to why the Lord raised up the apostle Paul, is in reality at direct variance with the testimony of the Bible itself.

It is commonly said that the apostle Paul should have been the replacement for Judas in Acts 1, and not Matthias. Peter and the others, it is often said, acted hastily in replacing Judas, and in fact were in error in ordaining Matthias. The Lord's choice was Paul all along, it is said. Paul was the Lord's "*chosen vessel*", not Matthias. Therefore, the Lord had to correct the impetuous act of Peter and the others by coming back from heaven and personally raising up Paul.

Though this kind of thinking and explanation generally prevails among Christians, an examination of the Scriptures will show that it is incorrect. A thoughtful consideration of the testimony of God's word on the matter will show, first of all, that Peter and the others were NOT in error in ordaining Matthias to replace Judas, as recorded in Acts 1. Matthias WAS God's choice for Judas' replacement. But moreover, an examination of the Scriptures will show that, as God has Paul himself explain, the reason God raised him up as a new apostle is because God with him revealed the ushering in of a new dispensation or program "*the dispensation of the grace of God*" for us Gentiles.

GOD'S CHOICE OF MATTHIAS

The record of Acts 1 shows that by no means did Peter and the others act hastily or contrary to the will of God in the ordaining of Matthias to their apostleship. But rather, they acted knowledgeably and in perfect accord with the outworking of God's program with Israel at that time. As Peter declared to the others following the Lord's ascension back to the Father, the issue concerning Judas was a subject matter of the Scriptures which "*must needs have been fulfilled*".

"And in those days Peter stood up in the midst of the disciples, and said, (the number of names together were about an hundred and twenty), Men *and* brethren, THIS SCRIPTURE MUST NEEDS HAVE BEEN FULFILLED, WHICH THE HOLY GHOST BY THE MOUTH OF DAVID SPAKE BEFORE CONCERNING JUDAS, which was guide to them that took Jesus. For he was numbered with us, and had obtained part of this ministry... FOR IT IS WRITTEN IN THE BOOK OF PSALMS, LET HIS HABITATION BE DESOLATE, AND LET NO MAN DWELL THEREIN: AND HIS BISHOPRIC LET ANOTHER TAKE." (Acts 1:15 20)

That which the Holy Ghost had described concerning Judas' "*habitation being desolate*" and "*no man dwelling therein*" had been fulfilled, as Peter pointed out. But the issue of "*another taking his bishopric*" had not yet been fulfilled. Peter and the others knew the context of those Psalms. The Lord had opened their eyes to understand the Scriptures, and they had just spent 40 days with the Lord learning of these things and receiving commandments from Him. They knew those things about Judas in the context of those Psalms and in the context of the progression of the outworking of God's program and dealings with Israel. They knew that according to the program of God as set forth in the Psalms another must take Judas' bishopric at this time. It is for this reason that Peter emphatically declares that "*of these men.....MUST ONE BE ORDAINED TO BE A WITNESS WITH US OF HIS RESURRECTION*". The Scriptures *must needs be fulfilled* and the time for its fulfilling was properly understood by Peter and the others to be at that time. They were not, therefore, acting hastily or contrary to the will of God.

In addition to this, though, is the patently obvious fact that the Lord had laid down qualifications for the one who was going to be Judas' replacement which entirely forbid Paul from being it. Peter sets forth these qualifications in verses 21 22 in saying....

"Wherefore of these men WHICH HAVE COMPANIED WITH US ALL THE TIME THAT THE LORD JESUS WENT IN AND OUT AMONG US, BEGINNING FROM THE BAPTISM OF JOHN, UNTO THE SAME DAY THAT HE WAS TAKEN UP FROM US, must one be ordained to be a witness with us of his resurrection."

These weren't qualifications which Peter thought up on his own, but rather these were ones he knew the Lord Himself had laid down as stated earlier in Matthew 19:27 28; Luke 22:28 30; John 15:27 e.g. Justus and Matthias fit these qualifications, as Acts 1:23 says. But Paul did not at all, not to mention that he was an enemy of the Lord at this time.

Peter and the others, therefore, made no error in ordaining Matthias to "*take part of this ministry and apostleship, from which Judas by transgression fell*". Even their "*giving forth of lots*" was proper and in accordance with God's dealings with Israel. (cf. Prov. 16:33 e.g.) Matthias was God's own choice as Judas' replacement, and he rightly filled that position. Paul, though, was the Lord's "*chosen vessel*" for an entirely different ministry and apostleship.

PAUL'S SPECIAL APOSTLESHIP

The opening chapters of the book of Acts describe the preaching and ministry of the Lord's 12 apostles to Israel, as they in accordance with God's mercy to His nation offered "*repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins*". They proclaimed to Israel the arrival of her "*last days*" as foretold in the prophets, and exhorted the "*men of Israel*" to avail themselves of the Lord's merciful offer to them and thereby "*save themselves from this untoward generation*". The forewarned and prophesied Lord's day of purging wrath was at hand, and the Lord was extending mercy to them before He commenced that day. (Acts 2:14 40; 3:19 26; 5:30 32)

But, as Acts 1 7 relate, Israel spurned God's mercy to them and culminated their rejection of it by the stoning of Stephen. At that time, as Stephen proclaimed in the vision given to him, the Lord was ready to "*make his enemies his footstool*" and commence His day of wrath. (Acts 7:51 56)

But, as Acts 9 records, instead of the Lord beginning to administer His day of wrath, He did something completely unexpected and unprophesied. He came back from heaven and raised up a brand new apostle Paul. And He commissioned him as the "*apostle of the Gentiles*" in connection with the ushering in of an unprophesied "*dispensation of the grace of God*" for us Gentiles. To Paul God revealed that He was holding back His day of wrath, and that He was temporarily setting aside His program and dealings with Israel, and that He was bringing in a dispensation of Gentile grace. As Paul testifies...

"For this cause I Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles, if ye have heard of THE DISPENSATION OF THE GRACE OF GOD WHICH IS GIVEN ME TO YOU WARD: HOW THAT BY REVELATION HE MADE KNOWN UNTO ME THE MYSTERY; (as I wrote afore in few words, whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in THE MYSTERY OF CHRIST) WHICH IN OTHER AGES WAS NOT MADE KNOWN UNTO THE SONS OF MEN, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit; that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs and of the same body and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel: WHEREOF I WAS MADE A MINISTER, ACCORDING TO THE GIFT OF THE GRACE OF GOD GIVEN UNTO ME BY THE EFFECTUAL WORKING OF HIS POWER." (Eph. 3:1 7)

To Paul God revealed the "*mystery of Christ*" the secret purpose which God has in Christ concerning us Gentiles and the "*new creation*" He is forming today. Which secret purpose God had kept "*hid in Himself*" before but has now made known, and which He is now accomplishing before He resumes and fulfills His program and purpose with Israel.

The apostleship of Paul IS special and different from that of the 12. Paul is God's apostle for us Gentiles today in this present dispensation of His grace to us. In his epistles God has set forth His word which is expressly TO US and ABOUT US today. The 12 apostles, in contrast, were commissioned by the Lord in connection with His program with Israel. Hence, their ministry and writings pertain to God's program with Israel.

SOME OF THE DIFFERENCES

Though this is but a brief examination of this subject, may the following list of some of the main differences between the apostleship of Paul and that of the 12, help to make this issue all the more apparent.

1. The 12 were called to be apostles by the Lord while He was here on the earth. (Matt. 10:1-4)

Paul was called to be an apostle by the unexpected reappearing of the Lord Jesus Christ from heaven. (Acts 9:1ff; I Cor. 15:8-10)

2. The apostleship of the 12 was to Israel alone, and then to Israel first, because God's program at that time was with Israel. (Matt. 10:5ff; Acts 3:25-26)

Paul was commissioned as "*the apostle of the Gentiles*" and was sent out to the nations, because the program of God now is the "*dispensation of the grace of God*" for us Gentiles. (Romans 11:13; Eph. 3:1ff)

3. Peter, and the other apostles, had the "*gospel of the circumcision*" committed unto them to proclaim; the good news of Israel's covenanted kingdom and blessings. (Matt. 10:6-8; Gal. 2:7-8)

Paul had the "*gospel of the uncircumcision*" committed unto him; the good news of God now being long suffering and having turned to us Gentiles to accomplish a secret purpose with us. (Gal. 2:7-8)

4. The 12, under their commission, sought to bring the nation of Israel to repentance in view of them crucifying their Christ. They indicted them for the crime, but offered them the forgiveness and blessing of God so they could participate in Israel's "*at hand*" kingdom. (Acts 3:12-26; 5:27-32)

Paul, under his commission, announced that Israel had fallen, and that God has temporarily set Israel's program aside, and that her fullness and kingdom won't come until after the "*fullness of the Gentiles be come in*". (Romans 11:11-25)

5. Peter, and the other apostles, announced to Israel that her "*last days*" were present, and that they lived in the days that all the prophets from Samuel and after have foretold of. (Acts 2:16-21; 3:24)

Paul announced that God is now longsuffering and that He has set Israel and the things on her time schedule aside and that the "*times and seasons*" are not being fulfilled now in this dispensation. (Romans 11:11-25; I Thess. 5:1-11; II Thess. 2:1-7)

6. Peter, and the other apostles, proclaimed to Israel the coming of "*the times of refreshing*" and the "*times of the restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began*". (Acts 3:19-22)

Paul proclaimed "*the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began,..*", and was "*hid in God*" in

ages and generations past. (Rom. 16:25 27; Eph. 3:1 6; Col. 1:25 26)

7. The 12 were commissioned and sent to water baptize in connection with the "*gospel of the kingdom*". (John 4:1 2; Matt.28:19 20; Acts 2:38ff)

The apostle Paul was not sent to water baptize. (I Cor. 1:17)

8. The 12, under their commission, operated upon a distinction existing between the Jews and the Gentiles. (Matt. 10:5 7; 15:21 28; Acts 3:25 26)

Paul, under his commission, now declares that "*time past*" distinction as done away, and the "*middle wall of partition*" broken down God having made "*both one*". Now there's "*no difference*". (II Cor. 5:14 19; Eph. 2:11 14)

9. The 12 operated with the law still in view along with the "*rudiments of the world*" it employed. (Matt. 5:17 19; 23:1 3)

Paul declares to us that God has not put us under the law, but under grace, and that He is not treating us as children today under the law with the "*rudiments of the world*". (Romans 6:14; Gal. 4:1 11; Col. 2:8 17)

10. The 12 were commissioned to preach the "*gospel of the kingdom*" to Israel, and to manifest the *signs of the kingdom* to them. (Matt. 10:1 8)

Paul was commissioned to preach the "*gospel of the grace of God*" to the Gentiles, and to manifest signs that confirmed the reality of God having turned to the Gentiles. (Romans 15: 14 19)

11. The 12 warned Israel of the coming wrath of God, and were prepared by the Lord to see and also go through the tribulation period. (Matt. 24:1 35; Acts 2:14 40; 3:19 23)

Paul declares to us the longsuffering of God, and the coming of the Lord for us to gather us together unto Himself, delivering us from the wrath to come. (I Thess. 1:10; 4:13 5:11)

12. The 12 preached the "*gospel of the kingdom*" to Israel for the three years of the Lord's earthly ministry, and did not understand and appreciate the meaning and significance of Christ's death and resurrection. (Matt. 16:21 23; Luke 9:43 45; 18:31 34) Following Christ's resurrection, when He had "*opened their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures*", they understood the necessity of Christ's sufferings, but only as it pertained to the establishment of Israel's kingdom glory. (Luke 24:25 27,44 49; Acts 1:1 12; 2:22 36; 3:12 21; 4:8 12)

To Paul was committed the full meaning and significance of the cross of Christ. His message was "the preaching of the cross", proclaiming it in all its glory as "*the power of God, and the wisdom of God*". To him was committed the "*due time*" testimony concerning Christ giving Himself "*a ransom for all men*". Also to Paul was committed the revelation of "*the mystery of God's will*", and how it will be accomplished through the genius of Christ's death, and resurrection. (I Cor.

1:22 24; I Tim. 2:1 7; I Cor. 2:6 8; Eph. 1:8 10)

13. Peter, and the other apostles, looked for and preached the earthly inheritance of Israel's covenanted kingdom. (Matt. 5:1 12ff; 19:27 30; Acts 3:19 21)

Paul, in connection with "*the mystery of Christ*", says to us that our *citizenship is in heaven*, and that we are seated "*together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus*". The "*vocation*" unto which we have been called is in the heavenly places, in accordance with Christ being the head of all principality and power. (Phil. 3:20 21; Eph. 1:19 23; 2:6)

14. The 12 only knew of the return of the Lord Jesus Christ after the tribulation period. (Matt. 24:15 35; Acts 1:9 12; 3:19 21)

Paul, as part of the mystery revelation given to him, teaches us about a coming of the Lord Jesus Christ for us before the day of His wrath. (I Cor. 15:50 52; I Thess. 4:13 5:11)

15. The 12 functioned in connection with God calling out of Israel a seed to inherit the kingdom. (Matt. 16:13 20; 21:33 45; Luke 12:32)

Paul functioned as "*the apostle of the Gentiles*", in connection with God having set Israel's program in abeyance and having put Jew and Gentile on the same level, for "*to make in himself of twain one new man*"; the "*new creation*", the church, the body of Christ. (Eph. 2:11 3:12)

16. The 12 were commissioned in their apostleship to bring Israel's rebelliousness to a head, and to in so doing vindicate the outpouring of God's wrath upon that generation. (Matt. 23:29-36; Luke 11:45-51)

Paul was commissioned to proclaim that God is now long suffering and is extending mercy and grace to all, even in spite of Israel's climactic rebelliousness. (Rom 11:28 36)

17. The 12 apostles looked forward to dealing with the Gentiles through Israel's regeneration and glory. (Matt. 28:16 20; Luke 24:44 49; Acts 1:1 8; 3:25 26)

The apostle Paul was commissioned by God and sent to us Gentiles in connection with Israel's stumbling and fall, and God's blinding of the nation. (Romans 11:1 25)

18. The 12 apostles in their call and commission were fulfilling the prophets, and were sent to Israel in accordance with God's promise to them. (John 17:6 12; Luke 11:49 51)

The apostle Paul was given a gracious apostleship to us Gentiles; not based upon any promise, prophecy, or covenant with us. (Rom. 1:1 5; Eph. 2:11 12; 3:1 9; II Tim. 1:9 11)