

THE APOSTLE PAUL AND HIS SPECIAL APOSTLESHIP FROM GOD

by K. R. Blades

In the Gospel accounts of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John we read about how that when the Lord Jesus Christ was here upon this earth He separated unto Himself 12 men whom He named and commissioned to be apostles. As Luke 6:13-16 records...

"And when it was day, he called *unto him* his disciples: and of them he chose twelve, whom he also named apostles; Simon, (whom he also named Peter), and Andrew his brother, James and John, Philip and Bartholomew, Matthew and Thomas, James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon called Zelotes, and Judas *the brother* of James, and Judas Iscariot, which also was the traitor."

As we go through the Gospel accounts we read how that these 12 apostles served with the Lord during His earthly ministry. We also read how that Judas Iscariot betrayed the Lord, and how that following the Lord's death, resurrection and ascension back to the Father, a man by the name of Matthias was chosen and ordained to replace Judas. (Acts 1:15 26) With Matthias now "*numbered with the eleven apostles*", the opening chapters of the book of Acts record the ministry and activities of these apostles as they carried out the ministry the Lord had given to them.

But when we come to the 9th chapter in the book of Acts, we learn about an event that took place which was unexpected. Without warning or previous indication of doing so, the Lord Jesus Christ came back from heaven and appeared unto a man by the name of Saul of Tarsus. As Acts 9:1 6 relate...

"And Saul, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went unto the high priest, and desired of him letters to Damascus to the synagogues, that if he found any of this way, whether they were men or women, he might bring them bound unto Jerusalem. And as he journeyed, he came near Damascus: and suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven: and he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? And he said, Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks. And he trembling and astonished said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do."

The Lord's unanticipated re appearance from heaven to this man Saul, (also known as Paul), is of profound importance, because as the Lord says 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:*". The Lord did not come back from heaven just to save Paul, and stop him from persecuting Him, but He came back to raise him up as a new apostle! In appearing to Paul, the Lord was raising up a brand new apostle, even though He had 12 others who were already functioning as apostles.

THE PUZZLE OF PAUL

The Lord's unexpected re appearance to Paul to raise him up as a new apostle is an intriguing issue. Why did the Lord do this? What was the purpose behind raising up a new apostle, and why was there a need for it? Various reasons have been proposed, with the most common ones appealing to either laxity or error on the part of the 12 apostles as the reason for why the Lord raised up Paul. The 12 were lax, it is said, in carrying out their commission to "*go into all the world*", and they remained in Jerusalem when the persecution arose about the stoning of Stephen. (Acts 8:1) Therefore, God raised up another apostle to hasten the spread of the gospel. Or, as it is most often said, Peter and the others acted hastily in replacing Judas, and were in error in ordaining Matthais. The Lord's choice was Paul all along, it is said, and He corrected their impetuous act when He raised up Paul.

But were the 12 apostles either lax in their commission, or in error when they ordained Matthias to replace Judas? Are either of these reasons the reason God gives for why He raised up Paul as a new apostle? An examination of the testimony of God's word will show, first of all, that the 12 apostles were neither lax or in error. And then it will show that, as God has Paul himself explain, the reason God raised him up as a new apostle is because God has ushered in a brand new dispensation the dispensation of the grace of God for us Gentiles.

THE 12 AND THEIR COMMISSION

The 12 apostles were called and commissioned by the Lord in connection with God's program and special dealings with the nation of Israel. The Lord Jesus Christ had come into this world as Israel's Messiah. He was their "*horn of salvation*" raised up in the house of God's servant David to whom the throne of David would be given and the kingdom restored to Israel. He would "*reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there would be no end*". He would save Israel from her enemies, and "*perform the mercy promised unto the fathers*" and "*remember His holy covenant*" and oath unto Abraham. (Luke 1:30 33; 67 75) With this being the program of God at this time, the gospel that God had proclaimed to Israel was "*the gospel of the kingdom*"; the good news to Israel that "*the kingdom of heaven is at hand*". (Matthew 3:1 3; Mark 1:14 15)

The 12 apostles were called and commissioned in connection with this program. As Matthew 10:1ff testifies, they were given power to manifest the *signs of the kingdom*, and they were told to only go to "*the lost sheep of the house of Israel*", and not to go to any Gentiles or even to any of the Samaritans.

"And when he had called unto *him* his twelve disciples, he gave them power *against* unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all manner of sickness and all manner of disease....These twelve Jesus sent forth, and commanded them, saying, Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into *any* city of the Samaritans enter ye not. But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. And as ye go, preach, saying, The kingdom of heaven is at hand." (verses 1, 5 7)

The reason for this restricted ministry is because it was Israel's kingdom that was in view, and the program of God called for Israel in her fullness and glory to be the blessing to the world. (cf. Isaiah 2:1 4; 11:1 10; 60:1 3)

The 12 apostles were not only commissioned to proclaim the gospel of the kingdom to Israel, but they were also chosen by the Lord to be rulers in the kingdom. As the Lord told them in Matthew 19:28...

"Verily I say unto you, that ye which have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel."

This is why there were 12 apostles. One for each tribe. They were Israel's apostles proclaiming to them the *gospel of the kingdom*, and they will be Israel's rulers in that kingdom.

A FURTHER COMMISSIONING OF THE 12

Following Christ's suffering and resurrection from the dead, the Lord further commissioned His apostles. He taught them that it was necessary for "*Christ to suffer these things and to enter into His glory*" (Luke 24:25 27). He also taught them that, having suffered, "*all power*" was now given unto Him with which to have His day, and so establish the kingdom. With this being the case, the Lord now further commissioned the apostles to preach the gospel of the kingdom in all the world. But they were to do this still in accordance with Israel's priority position. The Lord, therefore, said to them...

"that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, BEGINNING AT JERUSALEM" (Luke 24:47).

In the opening chapters of the book of Acts we see how that the 12 apostles, (now with Matthias replacing Judas), functioned in accordance with this further commissioning. They rightly limited their ministry to the "*men of Israel*" as they preached to them the arrival of Israel's "*last days*", just as the prophets foretold, (Acts 2:14 40). They rightly recognized and taught them that...

"Ye are the children of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with our fathers, saying unto Abraham, And in thy seed shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed. Unto you first God, having raised up his Son Jesus, sent him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities." (Acts 3:25 26)

The 12 apostles functioned just as they were commissioned, and they knew full well what God was doing, just as they declared to Israel's rulers in Acts 5:30 31.

"The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye slew and hanged on a tree. Him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a PRINCE and a Saviour, FOR TO GIVE REPENTANCE TO ISRAEL, and forgiveness of sins."

Since this was what God was doing, they dealt with the "*men of Israel*" and they continued to be "*witnesses of these things*" to them, just as the opening chapters of the book of Acts describe.

WERE THEY LAX IN THEIR MINISTRY?

By no means were the 12 lax or sluggish in their ministry. The repeated testimony is that they were "*filled with the Holy Ghost*", and that they "*spake the word of God with boldness*". As the record says, "*And with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus: and great grace was upon them all.*" (Acts 4:31,33)

They knew their commission, and they knew what God was doing. They knew that Israel was being dealt with according to the program and her covenant status, and according to the Lord's commissioning of them. Therefore, they ministered in Jerusalem, and remained there even when persecuted.

WERE THEY WRONG IN ORDAINING MATTHIAS?

A look at the record in Acts 1:15 26 will show that by no means were Peter and the others wrong or impetuous in ordaining Matthias. Peter referred knowledgeably to what "*the Holy Ghost by the mouth of David spake before concerning Judas*". He knew what David said in the Psalms about him, especially about "*and his bishopric let another take*". But moreover, Peter knew what David said about Judas in the context of those Psalms and in the context of the progression of God's dealings with Israel. He knew Judas' place must be filled at that time, in accordance with the Psalms. Therefore, he declares that "*of these men...MUST ONE BE ORDAINED to be a witness with us of his resurrection.*"

But not only that, the qualifications which the Lord laid down for one to "*take part in this ministry and apostleship*", forbid anyone like Paul from doing so. As Peter states in verses 21 22...

"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 that same day that he was taken up from us, must one be ordained to be a witness with us of his resurrection."

It is obvious that Paul did not meet these qualifications, not to even mention that he was an enemy of the Lord at this time.

No, Peter and the others were not in error in ordaining Matthias. They did not act impetuously and 'run ahead' of God. But rather, they acted in accordance with the Lord's will, and in accordance with the Psalms.

WHY THEN THE NEW APOSTLE PAUL?

God Himself answers that question through the testimony of the apostle Paul. This new apostle Paul is "*the apostle of the Gentiles*" in accordance with the ushering in of the new "*dispensation of the grace of God*" to us Gentiles. As Paul testifies in Ephesians 3...

"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:" (verses 1 6)

With the raising up of Paul, God ushered in this present dispensation of Gentile grace in which we live. He revealed to Paul that He was temporarily setting Israel and His program with her aside, (Rom. 11:1 25), and that He was turning to the Gentiles to accomplish with them a purpose He has in His Son, which was a "*mystery*" a purpose He kept secret and *hid in Himself in ages and generations past*. (cf. Rom. 16:25 27; Col. 1:25 27)

In this "*dispensation of the grace of God*" to us Gentiles, the former situation of Israel being "*nigh*" unto God and us Gentiles being "*far off*" no longer exists. God has set His program with Israel temporarily aside. He has "*broken down the middle wall of partition*" between Jew and Gentile and has put Jew and Gentile on the same level. And He is from this new situation forming "*one new man*"; the "*new creation*", the church the body of Christ. (Eph. 2:11 22) The apostle Paul is the one to whom God revealed the ushering in of this new program, or dispensation. To him "*the mystery of Christ*" was revealed, and through him as the Lord's "*chosen vessel*", it is made known. Because of this, Paul says in Romans 11:13...

"For I speak to you Gentiles, inasmuch as I am the apostle of the Gentiles, I magnify mine office".

When our Lord was here on this earth, God's program and dealings were with the nation of Israel. The 12 apostles were chosen, commissioned, and functioned in connection with that program. But God interrupted that program and He has ushered in a new program the dispensation of His grace to us Gentiles and He did this through a new apostle Paul. As Christians we need to know this and realize that it is through the epistles of the apostle Paul that God has set forth His word which is expressly TO us and ABOUT us today.