

Part Twelve of 'Dispensations'

Once the Elders of the Dispersion, centred at Rome, had failed to decide positively for Christ, Paul had fulfilled the Jewish part of the commission that the Lord placed upon him when he was in Damascus. He had also witnessed before kings and leaders. That left the gentiles. It was then, that the thrust of Paul's teaching changed, no longer centring upon the Jewish nation.

(Once again I would remind you that we are not saved by having our own opinions about the scriptures, but by what the Living Word **has done**, and by what the **written** Word, i.e. 'the Scriptures', say.) Let's look and see just what those scriptures do say about Paul's ministry about that time. If we pick it up towards the end of that part of his ministry, before he turned away from the Jews, we shall find an interesting part of it coming to pass. Just before the authorities finally shipped Paul to Rome, Paul had witnessed to the **King** and Festus about his ministry just as Jesus had said he would. We can find this in Acts 26v19-23. Note carefully, at this late stage, what he says, paying particular attention to v22-3. Remember, it's the scriptures that settle the issue, and we know that he was able to find Jews, and therefore synagogues, in at least seventeen foreign nations. So, unless we prefer our own ideas, Paul taught what Moses and the Prophets had taught, and that is the message that he took to the Jews. Anyway, the king found that he could have been set free, if he hadn't appealed to Caesar – Acts 26v32. Then, when he finally gets to Rome via a shipwreck and a time in Malta, where you will see that the signs that follow the preaching were still going on, we find that within three days of arriving at his prison house, he's organising a meeting with the Elders of Israel who dwell in Rome, namely the Leaders of the Jews of the Dispersion. Now, don't miss the point that the Day of Pentecost, which officially brought about the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, was remarkable in its stress upon the Jews of the dispersion, in that seventeen – and that's the number associated with 'perfect spiritual order' – different groups of Jews, all of whom had been born in these seventeen different foreign countries, heard, **'in the language of the country in which they were born,'** the wonderful works of God. Surely, the fact that this was recorded in the 'Scriptures' makes it worthy of special consideration. The point that I want to stress here is that right at the end of Paul's ministry to the Jews, God was careful to include the WHOLE nation of Israel, in the persons of their Elders, who were also part of that same dispersion. In their lack of decision, these Dispersion Leaders, dwelling in the capital city of the dispersion, effectively said 'NO' to Jesus being their King. The whole nation had, at that moment, rejected their King.

So we come to the final chapter of the Book of Acts. We have the privilege of being given a précis of Paul's teaching to these Dispersion Elders. Let's read together those relevant verses, i.e., from 28v23 onwards, noting in that verse what Paul's subject was.

Now, let me stress once more that though I was vaguely aware of this teaching, right back from my early days as a Christian, I didn't, in any way, 'push it'. However, when Charles and Rozel joined us, I was able to borrow some of his books and swot up on the subject. It has convinced me that

the modern day Pentecostal church was not founded at the Day of Pentecost. If you have read it through recently, you will be aware that the Book of Acts is basically divided into two parts, the first part being the account of God's Grace to His People, despite the fact that they crucified their King. To this end, the Twelve were sent forth to minister the truth about the King and His kingdom, thereby **confirming** the ministry of their Lord. The second half of the book deals mostly with the ministry of Paul. Remember that his commission, as given to him by the Lord, covered preaching to the Jews and to kings and to the Gentiles. It might help you to understand the Jewish mindset, and thus be free from the difficulty that Gentiles, spoken of in the Book of Acts, present to our present day understanding, if you read Matt 23v15. Gentiles were not only allowed to turn to the Jewish faith, they were, in fact, also actively **sought** by the Jews to this end. The Jews understood that they themselves were to be the 'Royal Priesthood' to the rest of the world, when the Kingdom was once again in operation. It would, after all, be pointless for them to be a 'nation of priests' if there was no one else to minister to. That they didn't see what the death and resurrection of Jesus had achieved, and that this time it was on behalf of the **whole world**, is made obvious by the fact that the 'middle wall of partition' - that had been built in the Temple, and beyond which no Gentile could go, on pain of death - remained in place until the Temple in Jerusalem was literally destroyed. It is for us to question just what Paul's place in all of this really was. After all, he wasn't necessary to the work of the Twelve who were operating their ministry whilst he was in active opposition to them, as the death of Stephen reveals. After his conversion we find that he went to them for advice and guidance on occasions. So, what was his ultimate destiny? After all, he is the man through whom the Holy Spirit gave us over half of the New Testament.

One thing that we can find out about is what he wrote of in his letters to the churches. We will find that some of his epistles were written before the destruction of Jerusalem. Some of the dates are not 'absolutely sure' ones, but to my mind, one of the keys to this problem is to see that second half of Paul's ministry. When he turned away from the Jews, he would not be bound by the conditions that were imposed upon the period of the additional GRACE that God had granted to the Nation. That period, which Paul worked along with until the time of the end of the Book of Acts, had, as the basis of Paul's preaching, all that was taught by Moses and the Prophets. In other words, he worked under the umbrella of the commission given to the Twelve until it was fulfilled in Rome, when the Elders didn't make a decision. (We must learn from that that the Lord looks for **commitment**, as we also see in Lk: 11v23. There isn't a fence to sit on in this case. If we don't come out for the Lord, we shall be considered to be against Him.) It needs to be noted that after this point, the Twelve effectively vanish from the picture. There are bits of tradition, but they are scarce. It isn't many years that Jerusalem is destroyed and with the consequent destruction of the Temple by fire - see Matt 22v1-7, where we have an exact prediction of this very scene, even to the second call to the Wedding Feast, which call was made by the Twelve, and to the burning of the city - the Nation can no longer worship in the way required by the Lord. That phase is finished until? However, we can find a link with this time and that of the Lord's ministry, so long as we recall the divine inspiration of all scripture. Let's take a look at a pattern that appears to link the Lord Jesus with Paul.

We have seen that Jesus was the King of Israel and that it was on this issue that He was rejected. Consequently we mustn't be surprised to find that He taught a great deal about the Kingdom. What is now known as the 'Sermon on the Mount' deals very largely with this topic, whilst in the Gospel of Matt: alone, the term 'the Kingdom of Heaven' occurs some 32 or 33 times. When we come to the thirteenth chapter of Matt: we find a group of parables through which the Lord referred to the Kingdom of Heaven. This occurred when the crowd was so great that He got into the boat and talked from there. He spoke to them about the Sower and the four different areas the seed fell into. He finished with a strange statement, namely, 'Who hath ears, let him hear.' Don't just take that as said; rather 'hear' what it said. It actually divided the crowds into two parts. Namely, there were those who could understand His teaching, and those who couldn't. It's explained in v12, and unless we get hold of this, **we** won't have 'heard'! To be able to 'hear,' was a GIFT. To the disciples, it had been **given** that they should get to know the mysteries of the Kingdom of the Heavens, but to the rest, it hadn't been given. It was as clear-cut as that. Then some further light is given regarding this great division that has been revealed and it is this; 'If you've got some, you'll be given more until you have an abundance, but if you haven't, you'll lose even the little that you have.' That fact explained the parables, showing that they weren't given to clarify the minds of the crowd, but rather to keep them in their ignorance.

Once we've understood this point, we are given to understand that a prophecy made by Isaiah is actually being fulfilled right there. Judgement is actually happening to these people, and even though they are 'attending the meetings', probably at cost and discomfort to themselves, the line has been crossed. Let's read the quote to be sure that we recognise it when we meet it again. We'll find it there in Matt: 13 and we'll read from v13 – 18, after which the Lord explains to the disciples – in private, as we see from v10 – the parable of the Sower, thereby fulfilling the promise that the fact that they had 'heard', qualified them to receive 'much more'. So, this situation reveals that at that very point, the prophecy found in Is:6v9-10 is actually being fulfilled. Israel is being given over to destruction.

Whilst that's fresh in our minds, let's turn to Acts 28. Here we are coming to a very abrupt climax to one part of Paul's ministry. He has called the Elders of the Dispersion together and we are given a sufficient outline of what he said to them. Let's read together from v23-28. He expounded the scriptures, 'testifying the Kingdom of God, and persuading them concerning Jesus, both from the law of Moses and the Prophets, from morning till evening.' We find that the Elders were divided – some believed and some didn't, and as we learned from Matt: 13, they were then divided into two camps. The unbelievers would be hardened further, whilst those who believed would be able to receive more.

We have therefore a link formed between our Lord and Paul. The Lord pronounced the beginning of the fulfilment of the Isaiah 6 prophecy, upon the crowd that were still dwelling in the Land, and now Paul quotes the same prophecy upon the Jews of the dispersion. Thus the whole of the

Nation is blinded to the truth, Isaiah's prophecy has been fulfilled, but God has retained to Himself a remnant of believers, which always brings to my mind 'the seven thousand' who hadn't bowed the knee. We'll deal with that in more detail at a later date, if the Lord will permit. Sufficient to say that the Lord's 'chosen vessel' Paul, had really grasped the Living Lord and His Word, with all of his heart and mind. In this he had himself qualified within the scope of what we have seen. The Twelve had received much more revelation once they had willingly 'heard', for the Lord had immediately revealed to them the 'mystery' of the Kingdom. They got the 'good' side, not the curse. But now, we have a character in Paul, who has also qualified for the 'abundance' that the Lord had promised in Matt: 13v12. The disciples' '**abundance**' came through the knowledge of the 'mystery' of the Kingdom. Well, Paul knew all about that, so we are left to speculate upon what '**mystery**' was revealed to him.

(To be continued.)

End of part 12. 25/8/10.