

PETER, PAUL AND ISRAEL

One fact should be apparent even to the casual observer: Peter's ministry very definitely anticipated Israel's *acceptance* of Messiah ([Acts 1:6, 2:30, 38,39, 3:17-26](#)), but Paul's just as definitely assumed Israel's continued *rejection* of Messiah. In fact, he was raised up by God *in view of Israel's rejection of Christ*, for God's answer to the stoning of Stephen and the dreadful persecution of [Acts 8:1-3](#) was the salvation of Saul, the chief persecutor and the leader of the rebellion. *Matchless grace!*

Those who hold the extreme views above referred to, argue further that "the blessing of the Gentiles [in Acts] is dependent upon the realization of the blessing promised to the Jew."

This was true of Peter's ministry, as [Acts 3:25, 26](#) indicates, but the very opposite was true of Paul's ministry. Acts 13:46 alone should settle this. Here, by no stretch of imagination can we conclude that the Gentiles were being blessed through Israel's realization of her blessings. The Gentiles, on the contrary, were being blessed because the Jews had put the Word of God from them. **"... SEEING YE PUT IT FROM YOU ... LO, WE TURN TO THE GENTILES."**

All this substantiates our basic contention that while Peter's ministry had to do with the blessing of the Gentiles through the *rise* of Israel, Paul's had to do with the blessing of the Gentiles through the *fall* of Israel. The former is the subject of *prophecy*, the latter of the *mystery*.

Is it correct to speak of Israel's "primacy" during the later Acts period? Romans 11 makes it clear that Israel's fate was already settled before Acts 28, even though the sentence had not yet been officially pronounced.

"ISRAEL HATH NOT OBTAINED THAT WHICH HE SEEKETH FOR ... THE ELECTION HATH OBTAINED IT, AND THE REST WERE BLINDED... THEIR FALL ... THE FALL OF THEM ... THE DIMINISHING OF THEM ... IF BY ANY MEANS I ... MIGHT SAVE SOME OF THEM ... THE CASTING AWAY OF THEM... BLINDNESS [or DULLED) PERCEPTION] IN PART IS HAPPENED TO ISRAEL, UNTIL THE FULNESS OF THE GENTILES BE COME IN ... THEY ARE ENEMIES ... GOD HATH CONCLUDED THEM ALL IN UNBELIEF ..."(Rom. 11:7-32).

Before the martyrdom of Stephen, Peter promised the return of Christ to earth upon condition of Israel's repentance. After Stephen, God raised up Paul *who never made such an offer*. Acts is the story of the fall of Israel, and the stoning of Stephen marks the crisis. 69 Romans was written *before* Paul's Journey to Rome ([Rom. 1:10-15](#)).

THE JEW FIRST Statement

But what about Paul's famous statement in Rom. 1:16:

"FOR I AM NOT ASHAMED OF THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST: FOR IT IS THE POWER OF GOD UNTO SALVATION TO EVERY ONE THAT BELIEVETH; TO THE JEW FIRST AND ALSO TO THE GREEK."

Many have missed the very point of this passage by taking this one verse out of its context. They have made it Paul's defense for going to the Jew first, when in reality he defends his ministry among the *Gentiles* in this passage. Let us see: In accordance with the prophetic plan our Lord had instructed the apostles to make disciples of all nations "*beginning at Jerusalem*" ([Matt. 28:19](#), cf. [Luke 24:47](#)).

The twelve apostles began their work there. Peter declared to the "men of Israel" in Jerusalem's temple:

"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" (Acts3:25,26).

Acts 11:19 further makes it clear that, until Peter was sent to Cornelius, even the scattered disciples had preached the Word *"to none but unto the Jews only."* Israel was to be the channel of blessing to the world. The apostles sought earnestly to bring the favored nation to Messiah's feet, but —

"BUT TO ISRAEL HE SAITH, ALL DAY LONG HAVE I STRETCHED FORTH MY HANDS UNTO A DISOBEDIENT AND GAINSAING PEOPLE" (Rom. 10:21).

The gospel had gone to the Jew first and had been rejected, but God would not allow Israel to stand in the way of Gentile blessing, so He began to set Israel aside, raising up Paul to bring good news to the Gentiles notwithstanding. Contrast Peter's "you first" at Jerusalem, with Paul's "you first" at Antioch, where he says to the Jews:

"FOR WHOSOEVER SHALL CALL UPON THE NAME OF THE LORD SHALL BE SAVED."

Rom. 11:7 and 25 should be enough to convince us that Paul at that time understood that God had given the nation up and that a judicial blindness was already settling upon it.

As he opens his Roman epistle, therefore, he argues for his responsibility to go to *the Gentiles also*. Note carefully the emphasis in the whole passage:

"...THAT I MIGHT HAVE SOME FRUIT AMONG YOU ALSO, EVEN AS AMONG OTHER GENTILES.

"I AM DEBTOR BOTH TO THE GREEKS, AND TO THE BARBARIANS: BOTH TO THE WISE AND TO THE UNWISE [He does not even mention the Jew here].

"SO, AS MUCH AS IN ME IS, I AM READY TO PREACH THE GOSPEL TO YOU THAT ARE AT ROME ALSO, "FOR I AM NOT ASHAMED OF THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST: FOR IT IS THE POWER OF GOD UNTO SALVATION TO EVERY ONE THAT BELIEVETH; TO THE JEW FIRST, AND ALSO TO THE GREEK" (Rom 1:13, 16).

"IT WAS NECESSARY THAT THE WORD OF GOD SHOULD FIRST HAVE BEEN SPOKEN TO YOU, -- BUT -- SEEING YE PUT IT FROM YOU AND JUDGE YOURSELVES UNWORTHY OF EVERLASTING LIFE, LO, WE TURN TO THE GENTILES" (Acts 13:46).

All this throws clear light on Romans 1:16. Paul by no means contends here that the gospel should *continue* to be sent to the Jew first, otherwise Rom. 1:16 would most assuredly contradict Rom. 10:12,13, which says:

"FOR THERE IS NO DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE JEW AND THE GREEK: FOR THE SAME LORD OVER ALL IS RICH UNTO ALL THAT CALL UPON HIM.

His argument here is clearly that he is not ashamed to go to the *Gentiles at Rome* with the gospel, since it is the power of God unto salvation to *everyone that believeth*.

God's good news concerning Christ *had been* sent to the Jew first, but now, through Paul, was being sent to the Gentiles also, and Paul was ready, as much as in him was, to preach it to those "*at Rome also.*" Rom. 1:16, when thus considered in the light of its context, by no means conflicts with the rest of Romans. Those who use this passage to teach Jewish precedence today, miss one of the basic lessons of the book of Romans: that there is no longer any difference, in the sight of God, between the Jew and the Gentile and that both alike must now approach God as the fallen sons of Adam.

The great motive for Jewish missionary work in this age of grace is given to us, not in Rom. 1:16, but in Rom. 11:30-33:

"FOR AS YE [GENTILES] IN TIMES PAST HAVE NOT BELIEVED GOD, YET HAVE NOW OBTAINED MERCY THROUGH THEIR [ISRAEL'S] UNBELIEF:

"EVEN SO HAVE THESE ALSO NOW NOT BELIEVED, THAT THROUGH YOUR MERCY THEY ALSO MAY OBTAIN MERCY.

"FOR GOD HATH CONCLUDED THEM ALL IN UNBELIEF THAT HE MIGHT HAVE MERCY UPON ALL.

**"O THE DEPTH OF THE RICHES BOTH OF THE WISDOM AND KNOWLEDGE OF GOD!
HOW UNSEARCHABLE ARE HIS JUDGMENTS AND HIS WAYS PAST FINDING OUT!"**