

Paul's Five Ministries

FIVE general divisions may be formulated as covering the whole of the apostle Paul's career from his call to his decease. They are as follows:

1. Acts 9:1-30. Damascus. Arabia. Jerusalem. Tarsus. Antioch.
2. Acts 13:1 to 14:26. First steps and intimation of God's choice to life amongst the nations.
3. Acts 15:1 to 19:20. Associated with the Twelve (cf Romans 15:19).
4. Acts 19:21 to 28:31. Based on Israel's defection (The Conciliation).
5. After Acts 28. The Secret Economy.

The third section is that period where Paul works in conjunction with the twelve. It is bounded at each end by a fulfillment (cf 14:26 and 19:21). During this he is particularly witnessing to the Messiahship of the One Who was crucified (see Acts 17 and 18). The Bereans were able to check his assertions from the Scriptures. The theme is the "sure mercies of David," and how they are connected with the resurrection of the Messiah. This is the viewpoint in the Acts; it is the gospel of Messiah and subsequent to Acts 19:20 the apostle is able to say he has fully preached this gospel (Rom. 15:19), but not so the gospel of God's grace (see Acts 20:24). The Acts does not detail the message outside the synagogues; this is found in the epistles, and is grounded on matters connected with Abraham. The announcement to idolaters as recorded in the Acts is based on Luke's commission. He calls the Athenians to repentance in view of judgment (cf Acts 17:30,31 and Luke 24:46,47). His ministry to idolaters as related to the gospel of God is not the aspect in the Acts, but is given in the earlier epistles. At Thessalonica the opposition (Acts 17:5) is because of Messianic testimony; in the epistles it is because Paul speaks to the gentile idolaters who did not company with the synagogue (see 1 Thess. 2:16). The epistle speaks of their turning from idolatry (1:9,10) and presents the death of Christ as dealing with sin (5:10).

The fourth section corresponds largely with the written ministry; the Acts gives little details of the matter the apostle presents at this time. We find it in Romans, 2 Corinthians, and Galatians. First Corinthians has its historical basis in Acts 19.

The review and purview which Paul gives at Miletus (Acts 20) gives some details which follow these indications. Verse twenty refers to the synagogue witness--publicly--and private witness-- house to house. Particulars of the latter are in the epistles. Verse twenty-four gives definition to Paul's future course; it is wholly on the ground of the gospel of the grace of God, but it is not detailed in the Acts; the basis must be obtained from the pre-prison epistles.

Paul was separated to the gospel of God; he was separated from others and installed into something with which neither he nor they were connected; the dimensions of the movement are but dimly apparent in the Acts. Paul's ministry is not strictly a progression, a progression involves a forward movement in the same thing; Paul's operations are only progressive relative to the gospel of God; a full view of his movements is best defined as transitional--from one state to another--the subsequent state involving the essential elements of the original. These latter are how God deals with sin and gives righteousness and life, and they receive new relationships during the change.

Romans eleven brings before us a distinct situation in the process; it is the question of national status. Israel as a nation is apostate, and we learn that Israel's blindness is to continue. God will not give them ears to hear or eyes to see. The duration of Israel's future blindness now becomes defined by a point designated as "the fullness of the nations."

What does this latter phrase mean? It indicates a result arising out of the grafting of the wild olive into the true olive. Partaking of the root and fatness of the olive, there is to be the consequent fruit from the wild olive. A point in this direction will be reached, termed "the fullness of the nations." There will arise a remnant out of the nations enjoying the individual reconciliation consequent upon the exhibition of God's conciliation to the nations (as such). So also at this point individuals of Israel who hear Paul's gospel need not approach God through the law, but through the justification and conciliation effected by the death and resurrection of the

Lord Jesus Christ. Here we get a view why we can have the "body" in Romans; Jew and gentile are equal before God in such matters as sin, righteousness, and salvation and intimacy with God. Beyond this Ephesians informs us that now Jew and gentile in the actual eventuation of their salvation do not revert to the priority of Israel; even in this respect they are reconciled to each other (Eph.2); hence follows logically the definite position of Ephesians three as regards a joint-body, and a joint allotment.

Jew and gentile under the ministry of the Twelve and James, or even those descendants of Abraham who heard Paul's witness but did not perceive its spiritual force, did not come to the mutual understanding which faith in the teaching given in Romans, Corinthians, and Galatians inculcated (cf Acts 11 and 21, and observe they are believers).

The reality into which the salvation and conciliation of the individual will eventuate is not discussed in Romans eleven, but it is shown that the status accorded the nations (as such) is precarious and contingent upon faith amongst them. The status to which the nations have been raised is that they give out the light coming through the root Israel, and this because of the continued defection of Israel. Israel has not obtained righteousness; the nations are obtaining it, for they seek it by faith. Will Israel be provoked to emulate the nations? is the great question at this juncture (Rom.11:14). Because Israel is apostate God deals directly with the nations; He is conciliated to the nations (as such); God does not now interpose Israel between Himself and the nations.

This is the position before Acts twenty-eight. If events had followed the normal course pointed to by the prophets, the Lord Jesus, and the Twelve, the kingdom should have been established in spite of Israel's persistence in apostasy. The kingdom will ultimately become a fact because of God's judgments; repentance will bring preservation during such judgments.

During the Acts the "day of the Lord" is impending; it was only necessary for the events consonant with such prophecies as Daniel to arise and then the judgments will lead to the kingdom. Should this point be reached then blessings will flow to the nations through Israel. This is the Old Testament view, and before the initial events of the day of the Lord those called together by the apostle Paul would be taken out of the way according to 1 and 2 Thessalonians.

By way of digression it is here remarked that the secret economy will end by the same feature impending--the Day of the Lord. We shall be removed approximate to the initial events of Daniel seven, which events will give rise to the seventieth heptad. 1 Thessalonians is augmented by the feature of Ephesians that we are to enjoy a celestial allotment. The event of 1 Thessalonians four will close this economy.

Coming back to our theme, we get the teaching of Romans eleven introduced corresponding to Acts twenty. This gives us a secret that God will further delay the judgments. He will Himself call a complement out of the nations. If Israel will not go to the nations, God will go to them Himself. What will be the outcome?

Isaiah six does give a certain length to Israel's obstinacy; it does answer the prophet's query--how long?--But it does not intimate that any blessing will accrue to the nations because of it. Romans eleven extends the period and gives a new value to it, informing us of a secret hid from the prophet.

Here we get a division of Paul's ministry definitely based on Israel's defection; even at this point it is not apparent that they will be inducted into a celestial allotment. This situation in its various details forms a basis for the next division of Paul's ministry subsequent to Acts twenty-eight.

At Rome the apostle publicly announces that the holy spirit's description of Israel is perfectly true, and virtually he says it is impossible to lead Israel to emulate the nations. Will God's judgments therefore fall? Not at present, says the apostle's subsequent ministry; he now reveals the secret economy, which is grounded on the historical and doctrinal situation developed contemporary to Acts in the earlier epistles. It is outside the scope of the Acts to intimate the addition of the secret economy. The Acts terminates the divine record of Israel's history.

Out of Paul's itinerancy have arisen believers, Jew and gentile, and these are the body even prior to Acts twenty-eight. It will promote our apprehension of its relation to the secret economy if we consider the course through which it came into being. Strictly the body is outside the design of the Acts; on the other hand, it is

contemporary with much of the history of this period; so also it is as regards the earlier epistles of Paul. The body had its inception at Pisidian Antioch; it is the outcome of Paul's preaching there and onwards; it is definitely connected with his distinctive activities since his separation. Reflection on the whole course of events from this point will reveal that the body is an item agreeable either to an earthly or a celestial allotment.

In Acts fifteen, James does not definitely refer to the body, but his remarks and the deliberations show that a company out of the nations is not against Old Testament scriptures; such must however be subject to Israel's premier position evinced in the action of the council assuming their authority and despatching decrees to the nations through Paul.

The first Corinthian epistle gives more details on the matter, but does not commit the body to any definite destiny. It is the status within the body that is elaborated and defined on different lines to Old Testament requirements in Paul's later epistles, and this together with a definite destiny.

Because of the trend of events the body becomes the nucleus for the later revelation. An apt analogy of this may be observed in the chain which bound Paul; in Acts 28:20 it is for the "hope of Israel;" in Ephesians (cf 3:1 and 6:20) it is for you nations. Now, it was not a new or different chain; just so with the body, it comes into a new and permanent relationship.

A further illustration of the body in the two eras--before and after Acts twenty-eight--may be seen in Paul himself. Clearly he was connected with whatever he taught at any stage. If we make two bodies corresponding to two periods, then at least Paul must be brought over into the second; and why not therefore the other members? To bring the apostle only as a nucleus, is obviously absurd, and makes futile the work which has been previously done, which has brought matters to a definite position.

It must not be overlooked that during Acts thirteen to twenty-eight, the nations were "lodgers" of the covenants (Eph.2:12), and they disbursed their obligations for such privilege (Rom.15:27). Here again we have an aspect of the internal status of the body prior to the secret economy, and this is why we have the new covenant figuring in 1 Corinthians. Certain aspects of Paul's ministry in the Acts and early epistles are really enigmatical; especially is this so in 1 Corinthians (see 13:12), and it is necessary to recognize this in order to give value to the character of it. When we reach immediately prior to Acts twenty-eight it has become more definite as outlined in this paper. Contingencies and conditions have receded and God goes forward readjusting the eons to correspond with His ways in the present secret economy. Thus we come to learn the final and present form of God's grace, and we require the whole of Paul's epistles for this.

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