

THE UPWARD CALL

*Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet;
but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead,
**I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God
IN CHRIST JESUS.***

(Philippians 3:13-14 NASB)

#03-09157

The Fullness of the Nations #2 [Ethnos]

August 27, 2009

In the last issue (#03-09156, August 26, 2009), I proposed that those who translate Scripture from the original languages into our native languages often inject what I call **interpretative bias**. In other words, they interpret the context for us and skew its meaning based on the way they translate certain words. I often cite the words *olam* and *aion* as words that are routinely interpreted in various translations in a way that biases the reader to see only in terms of eternal or the world and not in terms of eons or ages. I wrote a lengthy book titled *The Purpose and Plan of the Eons* that hopefully has helped some to understand this matter.

This series takes up two words that also have fallen prey to interpretative bias—the words *goy* and *ethnos*, which are best uniformly translated by the word *nation*.

Now, let us consider Romans 11 and Paul's use of the word *ethnos*, used 5 times (Romans 11:11, 12, 13 (twice), 25). Immediately, we are faced with a challenge because many translations use the word *Gentiles* instead of nations, so that when we come to verse 25, we are led to believe that the fullness of the nations (Gentiles) refers to non-Jewish or heathen nations.

(25) For I do not wish you to be ignorant, brethren, of this secret—that ye may not be wise in your own conceits—that hardness in part to Israel hath happened till the fulness of the nations [ethnos] may come in; (26) and so all Israel shall be saved, according as it hath been written, 'There shall come forth out of Sion [Zion] he who is delivering, and he shall turn away impiety from Jacob, (27) and this to them is the covenant from Me, when I may take away their sins.' (Romans 11:25-27 YLT)

Before attempting to explain what Paul meant by the phrase *the fullness of the nations*, I need to make a few more points.

First, a search of 25 different translations revealed that, in verse 25, the word *ethnos* has been translated *Gentiles* in 19 translations, *God's non-Jewish people* in 1 translation, and *nations* in 5 translations. Clearly, a majority believe that the phrase *the fullness of the Gentiles* is preferred over *the fullness of the nations*. In other words, the majority of translators believe that Paul was referring to a period of time in which the gentile nations, not the Israelite nation, are to be saved. But, does this make *the fullness of the Gentiles* the more biblically sound rendering, or does its use indicate interpretative bias on a grand scale? I think it is the latter.

Keep in mind that, according to Scripture, gentiles, heathens, Jews, or any other grouping of people can be nations based on the words *goy* and *ethnos*. The context surrounding the word determines the identity of the people. Or simply, context determines identity.

Second, we need to throw off the tradition of men that sees the word *Israel* through the lens of a single Jewish nation, most notably the ancient one located in Canaan and the one now sitting in the Middle East that is presumed to be made up of blood descendants of Jacob and his son Judah, but also includes descendants of Ishmael and Esau.

However, the name *Israel* was given to Jacob not when he was born but later in life when he came to see that God rules. The name *Israel*, meaning God rules, was given to Jacob, meaning supplanter, after he wrestled with the Lord all night. Thus, Israel is not a name given based on a certain bloodline but on a certain character or, more specifically, a yielding to the will and sovereignty of God. Jacob was a man

ruled by his will and strength, but Israel was a broken man ruled by the will of God who leaned on God for strength. As you recall, Israel's hip was dislocated so that he had a limp.

Third, the revived, present-day nation called *Israel* is in the exact same condition that the ancient, historical one was in; both are disqualified from inheriting the kingdom (e.g., Matthew 8:10-12; 12:31-32; 21:33-42; 22:1-14; Luke 14:16-24). The present Israel has failed to bear the fruit of the kingdom of God even though its leaves have come forth once again (Matthew 21:19, 43; 24:32).

Many assume that the rebirth of a modern-day nation called *Israel* is to fulfill prophecy that it will be the head of the nations in the coming kingdom of Christ. It is true that its rebirth is to fulfill prophecy, but not in this regard. It is to fulfill prophecy relating to **the controversy of Zion**, which speaks to the conflict between Jacob and Esau [Idumea, Edom] and Edom's desire to rebuild the desolate places (Isaiah 34:4-8; Malachi 1:1-4). The Lord has allowed Edom to rebuild (i.e., present-day Israel), but He will throw it down once again (Malachi 1:4; also see Psalm 78:60-61; Isaiah 29:1-6; Jeremiah 19:10-12; 7:12).

Israel, as the world presently knows it, had to come forth so that it could be judged in fulfillment of the Lord's promise to judge Jerusalem, **the great city which mystically is called Sodom and Egypt, where also their Lord was crucified** (Revelation 11:8). This city is aligned with mystery Babylon that will fall in an hour (Revelation 18).

At best, this Israel is of the old covenant based on the natural seed of Jacob, the circumcision of the flesh, and the letter of the law written on stone. At worst, some segments of the Israelite population are as secular as the rest of the world. Today, most who call themselves Jews continue in unbelief and reject the same Messiah that the ancient Jews rejected and killed over 2,000 years ago.

Fourth, God's true Israel is a nation based on the new covenant, the seed of God planted within the spirit of a new race, the circumcision of the heart, and the spirit of the law put into minds and written on hearts (Hebrews 8:7-13). A new nation came forth after the cross that bears the fruit of the kingdom, and this nation that has come forth from among the nations is spiritual Israel, the dwelling of God in spirit (Ephesians 2:22), that will bring many sons to glory (Hebrews 2:10).

Fifth, we need to understand that the name *Israel* refers primarily to birthright and sonship, not to rulership. Rulership comes through the line of Judah (Genesis 49:10), but the birthright and sonship come through the line of Israel; more specifically, through the line of Joseph (Genesis 48:15-16; 49:22).

Sixth, Solomon ruled over the kingdom of Israel, but after his death, it was divided into two tribes in the south (Judah and Benjamin) called the house of Judah, and the remaining ten tribes in the north called the house of Israel. The line of the king went with Judah. This is why Jesus had to be from the tribe of Judah. At the cross, He took the scepter of Judah. All who believe on Jesus unite themselves with Judah and its King, Jesus. However, entering the kingdom is a matter of birthright and being placed as a son who receives the inheritance of the Father's kingdom (Matthew 13:38; 43). The line of the son went with the line of Joseph and his sons, which is associated with the house of Israel.

Seventh, following the division of Solomon's kingdom, the two houses were taken into captivity. Judah eventually returned to Jerusalem and remained under foreign control; however, Israel was scattered among the nations and became known as the lost sheep of the house of Israel. They lost their national identity and, as such, were lost among the nations of the world. To this day, they have been separated from Judah, but a day is coming when they will be reunited as one kingdom under God's King, Jesus.

We need to be clear that the present-day state of Israel is not the lost house of Israel. The Zionists that founded this state usurped the name *Israel* (and *Zion*) as if they were a reunited kingdom of the two houses. They are not. If they had taken the name *Judah*, at least they would have been closer to the truth, although *Edom* might be the most accurate name.

These points may seem to be a deviation from a discussion of the word *ethnos*; however, they are important if we are to understand Paul's use of the word in Romans 11, as discussed in the next issue.