

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)

#03-09158

The Fullness of the Nations #3 [Ethnos]

August 28, 2009

(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)

As stated previously, in Romans 11, Paul referred to the *ethnos* (nations) 5 times, but the question before us is this: What did Paul mean by the phrase *the fullness of the nations*? Was he referring to non-Jewish nations, that is, Gentiles, as so many translations imply? My answer is no; Paul was actually referring to the nation of Israel, the house of Israel that was dispersed among the nations and became other nations.

Paul’s words could be rephrased as *the fullness of the Israelite nations*.

Again, 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 that was 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, as well as Ishmael and Esau.

When he learned that Jacob was sick, Joseph went to see his father, along with his two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim. Jacob blessed his son with fruitfulness and took Manasseh and Ephraim to be his own as Reuben and Simeon were his own. As Israel, Jacob called for the two sons so that he could bless them.

“The angel who has redeemed me from all evil, bless the lads; and may my name [Israel] live on in them, and the names of my fathers Abraham and Isaac; and may they grow into a multitude in the midst of the earth.” (Genesis 48:16 NASB)

However, although Manasseh was the firstborn, Israel placed Ephraim before his brother so that he would be greater than his older brother. In other words, the birthright was given to Ephraim.

(17) When Joseph saw that his father laid his right hand on Ephraim’s head, it displeased him; and he grasped his father’s hand to remove it from Ephraim’s head to Manasseh’s head. (18) Joseph said to his father, “Not so, my father, for this one is the firstborn. Place your right hand on his head.” (19) But his father refused and said, “I know, my son, I know; he also will become a people and he also will be great. However, his younger brother shall be greater than he, and his descendants shall become a multitude of nations.” (20) He blessed them that day, saying, “By you Israel will pronounce blessing, saying, ‘May God make you like Ephraim and Manasseh!’” Thus he put Ephraim before Manasseh. (Genesis 48:17-20 NASB)

Notice that Ephraim was blessed to become a multitude of nations, not one nation, and that he was blessed, along with his brother, to possess the name Israel. Thus the stage was set for not simply one nation called Israel but for many nations that are Israel. Israel is a multitude of nations, and it is in this context that Paul referred to the fullness of the nations.

But how did Ephraim become a multitude of nations known as Israel? It started when the Lord scattered the house of Israel. I should add that, according to the prophets, Ephraim and Israel are synonymous.

Through Hosea the prophet, the Lord spoke against the house of Israel as He commanded Hosea to take a wife of harlotry who gave birth to a son.

And the LORD said, “Name him Lo-ammi, for you are not My people and I am not your God.” (Hosea 1:9 NASB)

In the days of Moses, the Lord told His people that, if they rebelled against His commands or were unfaithful to Him, He would scatter them among the nations (Leviticus 26:33; Nehemiah 1:8), a warning that He repeated many times. Israel became a harlot and was cast out of the land and scattered among the nations, just as the Lord had promised. Although this might seem to be a great tragedy, it actually was part of the plan of God to bring forth a multitude of nations.

(10) Yet the number of the sons of Israel will be like the sand of the sea, which cannot be measured or numbered; and in the place where it is said to them, “You are not My people,” It will be said to them, “You are the sons of the living God.” (11) And the sons of Judah and the sons of Israel will be gathered together, and they will appoint for themselves one leader, and they will go up from the land, for great will be the day of Jezreel. (Hosea 1:10-11 NASB)

Verse 10 explains it very clearly; Israel was to be scattered into the nations with no name that identified them as belonging to the Lord. In other words, “You are not My people.” However, it is in this place, that is, among the nations, that it will be said of them “You are the sons of the living God.” It is at this point that both the house of Judah and the house of Israel will be reunited after being separated since the division of Solomon’s kingdom. Their one leader will be God’s King, Jesus.

The Lord, as the Sower of seed who seeks for a great harvest, scattered Israel throughout the earth.

And I will sow her to Me in the earth. And I will have mercy on No Mercy. And I will say to Not My People, You are My people! And they shall say, My God! (Hosea 2:23 LITV)

We are given the same picture of this sowing in the parable of the Sower in which Jesus sows the good seed in the field, which is the world, in order to reap a great harvest of sons of the kingdom (Matthew 13:18-23; 37-43). Thus, the sowing is to produce sons, which is what Ephraim signifies.

When His disciples questioned why He spoke in parables regarding the mysteries of the kingdom of the heavens, Jesus responded by quoting Isaiah 6:9-10 and stating it was being fulfilled. The people were blind, deaf, and dull (Matthew 13:10-17). Paul picked up this theme in Romans 11:25 by declaring that a partial hardening has happened to Israel. They were blind to the truth. But why? It was so the scattering would continue until the appointed time set by the Father. The appointed time is when the promise to Ephraim has been completed. The sons of Israel must be as the sand of the sea. By the way, the sea is often used as a reference to the nations.

Down through the millennia, the house of Israel that was scattered in the earth has become many nations. Undoubtedly, countless descendants of Israel helped to form many of the nations on earth today, especially those that sprung up in Europe and in other lands such as North America, Australia and South Africa. Of course, only God knows how the sowing has progressed, so this is not an exclusive list. But the point is that the fullness of the nations refers to the nations (plural) of Israel coming forth out of the earth, which, in turn, means that these nations must be brought into the Stone Kingdom with Jesus as King, until the kingdom fills the whole earth (Daniel 2:35).

However, let us be reminded that becoming an Israelite, on an individual level, is not a matter of bloodline but of a changed heart, one that believes on Jesus and declares Him to be Lord and King. On the national level, a nation becomes one of the nations of Israel by declaring Jesus is King over the nation. Based on its founding, the United States had great potential of this happening, but like all that have gone before, we too have failed. Why? So that **He may show mercy to all** (Romans 11:32)!

Only when all the nations have come into the kingdom of Christ to become Israelite nations will Paul’s prophetic word be fulfilled: **So all Israel will be saved**. Thus, the fullness of the nations refers to the full complement of the nations coming under the Kingship of Jesus. This is the true Israel on a national level; the nations that declare God rules and willingly submit to His righteous rule.