

MORE SEED & BREAD, ISSUE NO. 315

PAUL'S THE PATTERN

By Candy Davis

Our assignment in Mrs. Benson's 7th grade Home Economics class was to sew a pleated skirt with nothing but a mimeographed list of directions to go by. I can't describe my finished product except to say it looked nothing like a pleated skirt. A big fat "F," that was my grade. A pattern would have helped. Simplicity, Butterick, the kind you pin to the fabric to guide your cutting, giving you an overall shape to work with.

With all due respect to Mrs. Benson, her teaching methods pale in light of our Lord God Almighty. He knows how to get the job done. Whether he is introducing doctrine or prophesying events to come, our Lord knows that a picture is worth a thousand words, give or take.

Look at Moses, for instance. Long before the appearance of Christ, the life of Moses seems to preview the coming Savior in many ways. Here are just a few: Moses had an evil king wanting him dead from birth, he controlled the sea, he had 70 helpers, he was discredited by their brethren, and, above all, he was sent to deliver Israel.

In the same way, God uses another Biblical figure as a preview of things to come—this time the Apostle Paul. We're familiar with Paul's encounter with the Lord on the road to Damascus where Paul was transformed from persecutor to prime apostle. But there's more here than a singular conversion, albeit dramatic. Closer study of Scripture shows that Paul's conversion is a pattern, a preview, for Israel's future national conversion at the beginning of the full kingdom, as put forth by Otis Q. Sellers and Nathan C. Johnson.

To begin with, Paul himself says that he is a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting (1 Tim. 1:16). Paul further describes himself as one born out of due time (1 Cor. 15:8). I doubt this means Paul was due to be born on, say, February 13, but arrived prematurely on January 9, like

my son. No, the idea here is Paul's conversion to the Lord. Paul, a Jew, appeared on the scene centuries in advance of Israel's future national conversion, yet both Paul and Israel experience matching miraculous conversions.

Let's examine this pattern by looking at the similarities between Paul's conversion on the Damascus road and Israel's future national conversion at the start of the full kingdom.

BOTH ARE IN REBELLION AGAINST THE LORD

Paul was the chief persecutor of the disciples of the Lord, men and women alike (Acts 9:1-2). Israel, similarly, will be as stiff-necked, unbelieving and idolatrous as ever. Nothing short of a miraculous intervention by the Lord will be able to change her. **Ah sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a seed of evildoers, children that are corrupters: they have forsaken the Lord, they have provoked the Holy One of Israel unto anger, they are gone away backward. Why should ye be stricken any more? Ye will revolt more and more: the whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint** (Isa. 1:4-5).

BOTH ARE OUTSIDE THE LAND OF ISRAEL

Paul was in Syria on his way to Damascus with authority from the high priest to arrest disciples of Jesus for probable execution (Acts 9:1-3). Israel will be scattered outside her land, dispersed as she has been since the Babylonian captivity. **And the Lord shall scatter you among the nations, and ye shall be left few in number among the heathen, whither the Lord shall lead you** (Deut. 4:27).

A LIGHT SHINES ON BOTH FROM HEAVEN

Without warning Paul was stopped in his tracks by a blazing light shining from heaven. This was no ordinary light; it was God's Spirit of enlightenment, the unveiling (Gk.-*apokalupsin*) of the Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 9:3; 2 Tim. 4:1). Likewise, in the future while Israel is in dispersion and rebellion, God will speak from heaven, "Let there be light," resulting in the unveiling (Gk.-*apokalupsin*) of the Lord Jesus Christ. Suddenly the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea (Isa. 11:9). Mankind will be enlightened simultaneously in regard to sin, righteousness, and judgment (John 16:7-8; Psa. 76:8, 97:4).

We've seen this pattern even before Paul, in Genesis 1:2-3: **And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters, And God said, Let there be light: and there was light.**

BOTH ARE TOLD TO ARISE

Trembling and astonished at the light, Paul says, **Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do? And the Lord said unto him, Arise . . .** (Acts 9:6). Israel is told the same thing. **Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee** (Isa. 60:1).

BOTH ARE BLIND FOR THREE DAYS

Paul says the light from heaven is brighter than the noonday sun (Acts 22:6). As a result, he could not see for the glory of it (Acts 22:11). Paul was blind to everything but the light (Acts 9:9).

For the record, I'm from the era of the boxy Brownie camera with a flash so bright it could direct planes at the airport. Mom would line up us kids for a photo in our Easter finery or our Christmas "jammies" and then, ker-flassshhh! All I can say is, the picture itself may have turned out cute, but the sight of us kids groping our way around the house from the after-flash, not so much.

Paul's blindness parallels the future blindness of Israel with the exception that Paul's is physical and Israel's spiritual. When struck by God's light from heaven, Israel will be blind to all she has ever valued, treasured or worshipped. The sudden enlightenment from the Lord is all she will see: **Come, and let us return unto the Lord: for He hath torn, and He will heal us; He hath smitten, and He will bind us up. After two days will He revive us: in the third day He will raise us up, and we shall live in his sight. Then shall we know, if we follow on to know the Lord: His going forth is prepared as the morning; and He shall come unto us as the rain, as the latter and former rain unto the earth** (Hosea 6:1-3).

BOTH TRAVEL WHERE THE LORD DIRECTS

Paul's companions lead him to the house of Justus in Damascus where he will meet up with Ananias to receive his sight and be filled with the Holy Ghost (Act 9:6, 17). Israel will leave her belongings and the comfort of her homes and travel to the wilderness where God will present His truth and instructions for her. **And I will bring you out from the people, and will gather you out of the countries wherein ye are scattered, with a mighty hand, and with a stretched out arm, and with**

fury poured out. And I will bring you into the wilderness of the people, and there will I plead with you face to face. Like as I pleaded with your fathers in the wilderness of the land of Egypt, so will I plead with you, saith the Lord God (Ezek. 20:34-36).

BOTH ARE SAVED APART FROM THE PREACHING OF THE GOSPEL

Of the parallels we are discussing, this one is the kicker: Paul is brought to faith in the Lord apart from the preaching of the gospel. He is transformed by the miraculous intervention and enlightenment of the Spirit of God. Put in a modern context, nowhere in Scripture do we find Paul coming to faith in Christ after being handed a gospel tract while waiting in line at the grocery store, or attending an evangelistic crusade at his nearby sports arena, or glimpsing a gospel pitch on religious television. The same goes for Israel. Her conversion will not be through any preaching of the gospel, but by the Lord shining enlightenment from heaven through the Holy Spirit, imprinting His word on Israel's heart, just like He did with Paul.

All in all, the above parallels are hard to dismiss as mere hits or misses. Remember, the words of God are pure words (Psalm 12:6). God doesn't dabble in coincidences. His word is truth (John 17:17).

When it comes to believing that Paul is a pattern for Israel's future conversion, some dispensationalists balk. Impossible, they say, insisting that Paul's conversion inaugurated the Dispensation of Grace. It has nothing to do with Israel. I refer these folks to Paul himself who says, **Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth** (2 Tim. 2:15). Paul says we are to rightly divide, to separate, the Acts Period from the Dispensation of Grace, and the place to do this is Acts 28:28, where the Acts Period ends and the Dispensation of Grace commences. Since Paul was brought to faith in Christ during the Acts Period, I'd say he has everything to do with Israel, including being used as a pattern for their future conversion.

The Greek word for rightly dividing (*orthotomeō*) means "to cut straight." Paul knew all about cutting straight lines. He was a tentmaker by trade. When it comes to sewing skills it goes without saying that Paul's surpassed my own. Never ever would Paul have earned a big fat "F" in Mrs. Benson's sewing class, but perhaps he might have suggested letting her students use a pattern. They're very helpful. Paul should know. He is one.

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