Deuteronomy 32:8

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

> When the most High divided to the nations their inheritance, when he separated the sons of Adam, he set the bounds of the people according to the number of the children of Israel.

Analysis

When the most High divided to the nations their inheritance (be-hanchel 'Elyon goyim)—'Elyon (Most High) emphasizes God's sovereignty over ALL nations, not just Israel. The division of nations recalls the Table of Nations (Genesis 10) and Babel's dispersion (Genesis 11:8-9). God assigned territorial boundaries according to His sovereign will.

He set the bounds of the people according to the number of the children of Israel—this extraordinary claim asserts that world geography was arranged with Israel's inheritance in view. The Masoretic Text reads "sons of Israel"; the Septuagint and Dead Sea Scrolls (4QDeut) read "sons of God" (possibly referring to angelic beings supervising nations, cf. Daniel 10:13, 20-21).

Either reading affirms divine sovereignty: God predetermined national boundaries with redemptive purposes centered on Israel as the covenant people through whom Messiah would come. Paul echoes this in Acts 17:26: God 'determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation.'

Historical Context

This verse provides a theological interpretation of primeval history—the dispersion at Babel wasn't random but purposeful, preparing for Abraham's call and Israel's election. Ancient Near Eastern peoples believed territorial gods had limited

jurisdiction; Israel's faith radically asserted YHWH's universal sovereignty over all nations and territories. This cosmopolitan theology undergirds the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19)—the same God who scattered nations to prepare for Israel now gathers them through the Gospel. The textual variant ('sons of Israel' vs. 'sons of God') reflects different manuscript traditions but doesn't affect the central point: God's sovereign orchestration of history around His redemptive plan.

Related Passages

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

Psalm 19:1 — Heavens declare God's glory

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Study Questions

1. How does God's sovereignty over all nations (not just your own) shape your understanding of international events and mission?
2. What comfort comes from knowing God predetermined historical boundaries with redemptive purposes in mind?

Interlinear Text

בְּנֵ י	בְּהַפְרִיד ו	גּוֹ ם	עֶלְיוֹן	בְּהַנְחֵ ל
of the children	when he separated	to the nations	When the most High	divided
H1121	H6504	H1471	H5945	H5157

בְּנֵ י	לְמִסְפַּ ר	עַמְּ ים	גְּבֻל ת	יַצֵּב	אָדָ ם
of the children	according to the number	of the people	the bounds	he set	of Adam
H1121	H4557	H5971	H1367	H5324	H120

יִשְׂרָאֵל:
of Israel
H3478

Additional Cross-References

Acts 17:26 (Parallel theme): And hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation;

Psalms 115:16 (Parallel theme): The heaven, even the heavens, are the LORD'S: but the earth hath he given to the children of men.

Daniel 4:17 (Parallel theme): This matter is by the decree of the watchers, and the demand by the word of the holy ones: to the intent that the living may know that the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will, and setteth up over it the basest of men.

Psalms 91:1 (Parallel theme): He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty.

Psalms 92:8 (Parallel theme): But thou, LORD, art most high for evermore.

Genesis 10:15 (Parallel theme): And Canaan begat Sidon his firstborn, and Heth,

Genesis 10:25 (Parallel theme): And unto Eber were born two sons: the name of one was Peleg; for in his days was the earth divided; and his brother's name was Joktan.