

Romans 15:21

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

But as it is written, To whom he was not spoken of, they shall see: and they that have not heard shall understand.

Analysis

But as it is written, To whom he was not spoken of, they shall see: and they that have not heard shall understand (ἀλλὰ καθὼς γέγραπται· Οἵς οὐκ ἀνηγγέλη περὶ αὐτοῦ, ὄψονται, καὶ οἱ οὐκ ἀκηκόασιν συνήσουσιν, alla kathōs gegraptai· hois ouk anēngelē peri autou, opsontai, kai hoi ouk akēkoasin synēsousin)—Paul cites Isaiah 52:15 to ground his pioneer missionary principle in Scripture. Isaiah 52:13-53:12, the fourth Servant Song, describes the Suffering Servant's mission to astonish nations and kings who had not heard of him. Opsontai (they shall see) and synēsousin (they shall understand) indicate spiritual perception, not mere physical sight—unreached peoples will come to saving knowledge of the Servant.

Paul identifies himself with the Servant's mission: announcing the Servant (Christ) to those who've never heard. This christological reading of Isaiah 53 (universally applied to Jesus in the NT) motivates mission: if the Servant came for unreached nations, servants of the Servant must go to them. Missions is theological necessity, not optional activity—it flows from Christ's identity and work.

Historical Context

Isaiah 52:13-53:12 was central to early Christian reflection on Jesus's suffering, death, and exaltation (Acts 8:32-35, 1 Pet 2:22-25). Paul's application here connects soteriology (Christ's atoning work for all nations) with missiology

(apostolic mission to unreached peoples). The Servant's global mission necessitates the church's global mission.

Related Passages

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

Study Questions

1. How does connecting Paul's missionary principle to Isaiah 53 (the Suffering Servant) link missions to the heart of the gospel?
2. What unreached or under-reached groups in your context have 'not heard' and need to 'see and understand' Christ?
3. How should the scriptural mandate for pioneer missions shape church budgets, personnel deployment, and member sending?

Interlinear Text

ἀλλὰ καθὼς γέγραπται οἵ οὐκ ἀνηγγέλη περὶ αὐτοῦ
But as it is written To whom not he was of G846
G235 G2531 G1125 G3739 G3756 G312 G4012

ὄψονται καὶ οἵ οὐκ ἀκηκόασιν συνήσουσιν
they shall see and To whom not heard shall understand
G3700 G2532 G3739 G3756 G191 G4920

Additional Cross-References

Isaiah 52:15 (Parallel theme): So shall he sprinkle many nations; the kings shall shut their mouths at him: for that which had not been told them shall they see; and that which they had not heard shall they consider.

Isaiah 65:1 (Parallel theme): I am sought of them that asked not for me; I am found of them that sought me not: I said, Behold me, behold me, unto a nation that was not called by my name.

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