

SEED & BREAD

FOR THE SOWER ISA. 55:10 FOR THE EATER
BRIEF BIBLICAL MESSAGES FROM

THE WORD OF TRUTH MINISTRY

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The Importance of Acts 28:28

Great and complex truths cannot be said to be known until we have known and worked with them for a long time. It was in 1934 that I tentatively embraced the idea that Acts 28:28 marks a dispensational boundary line. Since then I have never ceased to search for a fuller and more complete understanding of the truth declared in this passage, to relate it to all that happened in the thirty-three years of the Acts period and to all that is now true since this declaration was made. Paul's words in this passage, spoken and recorded by inspiration of God, mark the close of the Acts period and the beginning of the Dispensation of Grace.

We hear much today about commitments, and no professing Christian should be without them. Some commitments are made with reservations and are subject to change. Others are made without reservations and can undergo no alteration. I believe that God will accept and watch over a true and proper commitment made by one of His own.

I will not attempt to set forth all the steps that led me to commit myself to the Lord Jesus as a perpetual and progressive student of the written word of God. It is sufficient to say that such a commitment was made long ago, that it was without reservations, and is, therefore, not subject to any change. Perpetual and progressive Bible study is my service unto and before the Lord. It has a single goal - to find for myself God's truth in the words He has given. In this I will be judged alone before my Lord and Master. I stand or fall before Him.

My conviction in regard to the Old and the New Testament is that they are the verbally inspired Word of God, that they are without error in their

original writings, that they are of supreme and final authority in regard to all matters of faith. By verbal inspiration, I mean that supernatural work of the Holy Spirit by which, without setting aside the personalities and literary abilities of the human instrument, He constituted the words of the Bible in its entirety as His written word to you and to me. I believe that every word of scripture was produced under the guidance of God's Spirit, that **"holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Spirit"** (2 Peter 1: 21). This conviction has stood the test of more than a half century of personal Bible research and study.

When one is led to devote himself to some task that is related to the service of the Lord, he should never dwell upon his capabilities or his shortcomings, his knowledge or the lack of it, his educated or his uneducated state. All these things are known to God, Who does not consider them when He leads a man into the study of His word. We serve the God to Whom belongs all power, wisdom, and knowledge. All thoughts of our capabilities or incapacities are meaningless in view of this. It is to Him we must turn if we would be successful in our studies in His Word and a help to others who may desire to know His truth. The things of men we can know because of the spirit of man which is in us, but the things of God no man can know but by the Spirit of God (1 Cor. 2:11).

A good share of my own Bible study efforts over many years have been applied to discovering the true character of the Acts dispensation and to finding the distinctive truths that apply in the present Dispensation of Grace. The difference between these two periods turns upon Paul's declaration in Acts 28:28, so to the assiduous study of this passage I return again and again. My understanding of this declaration has progressed and changed somewhat over the years, but my conviction has grown that these words do mark a dispensational boundary line.

I am not able to say who was the first to suggest that Acts 28:28 marks a dispensational change. I came upon this in 1929 in the book, *The Silence of God*, by Sir Robert Anderson, in which he says, "The Pentecostal dispensation is brought to a close by the promulgation of the solemn decree, "The salvation of God is sent to the Gentiles." (page 56). This book was written in 1897, and it could be that this is one of the earliest references to this illuminating idea.

There is no evidence that Sir Robert Anderson ever followed this idea out

to all its logical conclusions. In his writings he made no distinction between those epistles written before Acts 28:28 and those written after. He treated them as though they had all been written under one divine administration, which they were not. First and Second Thessalonians, First and Second Corinthians, Galatians, and Romans were written before the dispensational change, and in many passages set forth the distinct truths that prevailed only in the Acts period. Philippians, Colossians, Ephesians, 1 Timothy, Titus, 2 Timothy, and Philemon were written after the dispensational change and they take on the character of the time in which they were written.

Dr. E. W. Bullinger made the same mistake as Sir Robert Anderson, not correcting it until five years before his death, a fact that does not show in most of his writings. Others have declared for Acts 28:28 and then withdrew from the field of battle. A. E. Knoch declared, "It was not until the end of the Acts era that the salvation of God is sent directly to the nations (Acts 28:28).'¹ (*Concordant Version* notes on Matt. 15:21).

In regards to Acts 28:28 one cardinal fact needs to be faced and admitted. If Paul's words in this passage mark the dispensational boundary line, if they mark a new method of divine dealing with mankind, then the change that took place, or at least the most important feature of that change, must be epitomized in these words. In this passage there has to be a declaration of something that was not true before, but became true from that moment on. In Paul's words we must find summed up the answer to the question, What was the change that took place at Acts 28:28?

All through secular history there have been great declarations that brought about great changes. In all these pronouncements the change has always been clearly stated. Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation was one of these. The force of and the change declared in his powerful words cannot be missed. "All persons held as slaves within any State. . . shall be then, thenceforward, and forever free." These words proclaimed a great administrative change in the United States government, setting free those who were slaves and settling the question of human slavery in this country.

Even so it is with the divine decree announced by Paul in Acts 28:28. The major feature of the change it brought about must be declared by its words. It is a succinct statement, compressing a great truth into the fewest possible words. In studying it we must discover exactly what it says and then what is meant by what is said. The first of these has to do with translation and the second with interpretation. The translation must be correct from the literary

and grammatical standpoint. The interpretation must be correct from the historical aspect.

At the close of that all-day meeting with the chief of the Jews in Rome, Paul declared in his final words to them, as we find it in the *King James Version*: "**Be it known therefore unto you, that the salvation of God is sent to the Gentiles, and that they will hear it.**"

This statement is either important or unimportant. It either declares something that had long been true, as many say, or it declares something that became true from this point onward. My own position is that these words are of the utmost importance, that they say much in one brief statement, and that they declare a new overarching truth.

There are four important words in this statement that must be examined. These are *salvation*, *sent*, *Gentiles*, and *hear*. It is obvious that these words need to be considered in their Greek originals. I have exhaustively studied the word *soterion* which here is translated "salvation", and have come to the conclusion that this adjective means *salvation-bringing*. See Issue SB008 for all details. Supplying the noun from the context I would render this "the salvation-bringing message."

The word translated "sent" is *apostello*, which since it is used here of an inanimate thing should be translated "authorized", in the sense of being made freely available. See Issue **SB005** for details.

The word translated "Gentiles" in Acts 28:28 is *ethnos*. It is preceded by the definite article. All scholars, lexicographers, and commentators agree that *ethnos* means "nation", even though they think that at times it signifies those who are not of Israel and should in such places be translated "Gentile." However, all such renderings are interpretations and not translations. There are passages where the term "the nations" includes the nation of Israel, and to translate it "the Gentiles" would exclude that nation. See Matt. 12: 18, 21 and Eph. 3:6 for example of this. In Acts 28:28 the words *tois ethnesin*, being dative, plural, neuter, should be translated "to the nations." But since it is evident from Acts 10:36 and 13:26 that God's salvation-bringing word had been authorized to Israel from the day of Pentecost, this nation is not particularly in view in this pronouncement.

The word translated "hear" in Acts 28:28 is *akouo*. That this word means

"to hear" cannot be questioned. But if each one of the 437 occurrences of this word is considered we soon get the feeling that this word often means getting through to a person. An example of this is seen in Matt. 18: 15, "if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother." While, as a rule, hearing is related to the ear, yet one can be said to have heard that which he has read. In this passage "they will hear it" means it will get through to them for their benefit. This is God's guarantee made by His spokesman Paul.

Thus an honest, grammatical, and literal translation of Acts28:28 should read: Let it then be known unto you, that the salvation-bringing message of God has been authorized to the nations, and they will hear it.

The words "has been authorized" declare an accomplished fact. The words "they will hear it" declare a future result. In the first statement the tense is the second aorist, and in the second it is future. This is the way it should be.

END Issue SB011