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FOR THE SOWER ISA. 55: 1 0 FOR THE EATER
BRIEF BIBLICAL MESSAGES FROM

THE WORD OF TRUTH MINISTRY

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THE CONFIRMATION OF THE MESSAGE

The strange character of the thirty-three years of the Acts period should never be stultified or passed over lightly by anyone who cares about the truth of God. This is done by almost all past and present theologians, yet the uniqueness of this period of time stands out more and more when one believably reads the four gospels, the Acts, and the epistles written during this time.

One of the outstanding characteristics of this period was that the gospel was always confirmed and accredited by the signs that followed it. Mark encapsulates the history of this period in the last verse of his gospel saying: "**And they went forth, and preached (heralded) everywhere, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following**" (Mark 16:20). This dominated the Acts period.

The Lord Jesus had set the stage for this at the beginning of His earthly ministry. When He positioned His twelve disciples in relationship to Himself, He gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all manner of sickness and all manner of disease (Matt. 10:1).

These men possessing these great powers were "sent forth" (**apostello** - commissioned by the Lord) to go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel and to herald a very simple message consisting of one short sentence: "**The kingdom of the heavens is at hand**" (Matt. 10:7). As they traveled they were to confirm their message as divine truth by healing the sick, cleansing the lepers, raising the dead, casting out devils (10:8).

If these attesting miracles are considered as to their character it will be seen that three of them could have been falsified but one could not. Any of them could have performed ritualistic, mumbo-jumbo over a leper, pronounced him to be clean, then left town before the actual results could be checked. And they could have found many who were plagued with imaginary demon-possession (even as many are today) and after performing their hocus-pocus, called upon the demon to come out, yelled "here he comes" and "there he goes" and then pronounced the victim to be free.

However, the resurrection of a dead person could not be falsified. Thus the four things taken together when performed regularly and consistently provided unquestionable confirmation of the truth of the simple message they proclaimed.

After the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus, He appeared to His disciples who were directed by Him to go into all the world and herald the gospel in every creation (Mark 16:15). The words "every creation," according to the Biblical usage of the word **ktisis**, means every nation, province, state and city that was encompassed in the Roman Empire. Most of these had their contingent of Jews: as Herod Agrippa is cited by Josephus as saying, *"There is no people upon the habitable earth which have not some portion of you (Jews) among them."*

Some of these "creations" would be very hostile toward the presence of these heralds in their provinces, while others might be more or less friendly, such as on the Isle of Paphos where Sergius Paulus was the Roman proconsul (Acts 13:6-7). But the heralds were not to choose the easy places. They were to preach the gospel "in every creation," whether the political climate was favorable or not. If there were Israelites within the borders of these creations, they were to go there. The divine rule of the Acts period was **"to the Jew first" (Rom. 1:16)**.

It was the disciples' fulfillment of this commission that did so much during the Acts period to give that period of time its unique character. The heralds went forth and proclaimed the gospel everywhere, covering every Israelite in Palestine and those who were then dispersed throughout the Roman world. They did what they were told to do, and God did what He promised He would do. The final verse of Mark's gospel is proof of this. **"They went forth and heralded everywhere, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following."** In regard to this statement we need to exercise faith, that is, we need to take God at His word and think accordingly.

It should also be noted that God not did just confirm the word to the hearers, He also certified the faith of those who believed upon hearing the word. Their faith was certified by five pertinent, miraculous manifestations that appeared in their lives. I say "pertinent" because these signs were related to the lives these heralds would live and the work they were to do. After declaring that "These signs shall follow them that believe," our Lord listed the five manifestations of God's activity that would accompany them.

"They shall cast out demons." The divine activity that began on the day of Pentecost and continued throughout the Acts period was sure to bring about a great irruption of demonic activity. Philip came up against this in Samaria (Acts 8:5-8) and Paul found the same in Phillipi (Acts 16:16-18).

"They shall be speaking in new languages," The gift of a language is one of the most remarkable miracles recorded in Scripture, and this gift was a meaningful reality in the Acts period. The disciples on the day of Pentecost were faced with the reality that the Jews gathered there that day were "out of every nation under heaven" (Acts 2:5), and that they spoke seventeen languages and dialects. These were men that God intended should hear the gospel, and these foreign-born Jews had every right to hear it in their own vernacular. The disciples were equal to this, for the Lord had said: "They will speak with new languages." The report of the hearers was: **"We hear every man speak in our own language, wherein we were born,"** that is "our mother tongue" (Acts 2:8).

"They shall take up serpents." This power was not just a sign; it was a most practical gift. Poisonous snakes abounded in Palestine, Syria, and the wilderness of Sinai. As men walked about bare-legged and in sandals, their feet and legs were often the targets of vipers. Even before this promise was given, they were promised power to tread upon serpents and scorpions (Luke 10: 19), and were assured that **"nothing shall by any means hurt you"** (Luke 10: 19). Now they are told that they would take up (gather up) serpents. This was a most valuable and relevant power given to those whose lives would be given to much travel, usually walking, most of the time sleeping in the open, in snake-infested areas, wrapped only in their own garments or any other meager covering they carried along. The warmth of their bodies was a constant invitation for vipers to crawl in. If this happened, they were in no danger. All they needed to do was gather them up and cast them away.

"And if they drink any deadly thing it shall not hurt them." Poisoning was the commonly used method of assassination at the time these words were spoken. It is quite probable that when the Pharisees held a council against Jesus as to "how they might destroy Him," assassination by means of poisoning was suggested. In that time, if poison could be secretly administered, it resulted in a crime that could not be detected, there being no such thing as autopsies or chemical analysis of the contents of the stomach. The believers in the Acts period were the objects of the most malignant, Satan-generated hatred that men have ever known. Many would gladly have murdered them, thinking they were serving God in so doing (John 16:2).

"They shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover." Note that it does not say they shall anoint the sick with oil, or that they shall pray for the sick, but that they shall lay hands on the sick. These men were performing as mediators between God and men, health flowed out from God through them, and the sick recovered. Faith on the part of those who were sick was not a prerequisite. See Acts 28:7-9. They added no gimmicks, made no claims, engaged in no deceitful practices. They did not pitch tents, organize choirs, or work up the people into frenzied emotional states. They never failed. They simply laid hands on the sick and the sick recovered.

Thus it was in the 33 years of the Acts period when God always confirmed the heralding message with signs following. This whole period is in the mind of the writer of Hebrews when he declared: "**How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard Him; God also bearing them witness, both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to His own will** (Hebrews 2:3-4).

About 25 years after the day of Pentecost the Apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthian believers and declared that they had been enriched by Jesus Christ in all utterance and knowledge, and that this was according as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in them so that they were not deficient in a single gift. If the Scriptures are searched, these gifts will be found to be nineteen in number as follows: apostles, prophets, evangelists, teachers, discernment of spirits, word of wisdom, word of knowledge, exhortation, faith, miracles, healings, languages (tongues), interpretation of languages (tongues), ministry, administration, ruling, helping, mercy, giving.

These nineteen gifts of the Spirit could all be found among the **ekklesia** in Corinth. Some have argued that these were only natural gifts used by the Holy Spirit, but this idea is impossible when each one is carefully considered.

Take for example the gift of teaching. It is readily admitted that some men have an aptitude along this line of effort. They love to teach others, and when they find that they can take complex ideas and make them simple so that others can understand and receive them, they feel driven to teach. Nevertheless, this is not the gift of teaching set forth in the Scriptures. This gift consisted of the material given that was to be set forth. Such material was not the result of study or research, it was not the product of hard work, it was the gift of God.

Many men have a natural aptitude for a few of the things listed in the gifts set forth. Some have an aptitude for teaching, others for administration, ruling, helping, giving. However, there is no such thing as an aptitude or talent toward apostleship, prophetic ministry, miracles, or healing. Furthermore, not one of these gifts is available to anyone today. All of these were related to the confirmation of the message.

This confirmation is not a part of divine activity under God's administration of grace.

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