

MORE Seed and Bread

BRIEF BIBLICAL MESSAGES FROM

MSB263

THE WORD OF TRUTH MINISTRY

Otis Q. Sellers, Founder -- David R. Hettema, Director

WHAT WAS THE "CHURCH" OF THE ACTS PERIOD?

By M.B. Hammond

The "church" or "assembly of out-called ones" of the Acts Period was unlike anything we see today during the Dispensation of the Grace of God, or in the past 1,940 years. It did not own land or have any beautiful buildings, and it did not have pretentious leaders with eloquent titles, fancy robes, strange hats, fine rings or symbolic jewelry. Instead, it was dedicated to the work of presenting Christ and was directed in a visible way by the Holy Spirit. In **Young's Analytical Concordance** the Greek word *ekklesia*, translated "church," means "that which is out-called [for service to God]." E.W. Bullinger suggested that this refers to the whole community of redeemed individuals wherever they lived and assembled.

The 120 disciples of Christ waiting in the upstairs room on the day of Pentecost (circa 30 AD) were the first group so designated. Just before His ascension, Jesus was with them and **...commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which saith He, Ye have heard of Me. For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days hence (Acts 1:4-5).** They asked when He would restore the Kingdom to Israel, but He did not answer that. Instead, He said, **But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Spirit is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me in all Judaea, and in Samaria and unto the uttermost part of the earth (Acts 1:8).**

They had only about eight days to wait; in this time Matthias was chosen by lot to replace Judas Iscariot, the traitor: And when the day of Pentecost

was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing of a mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were filled with the Holy Spirit, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance. And there were dwelling at Jerusalem Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven. Now when this was noised abroad, the multitude came together, and were confounded because that every man heard them speak in his own language, and they were all amazed and marveled, saying one to another, Behold, are not all these which speak Galilaeans? And how hear we every man in our own tongue (language) wherein we were born? (Acts 2:1-8). These devout men were amazed and some asked what it meant while others mocked it. These believers were dressed simply, having no robes, tassels and phylacteries as the Pharisees. Truly, these first believers were credentialed by this manifest gift of languages of the Holy Spirit, and other such gifts became evident in the entire Acts Period (33 years duration).

After Peter delivered his impassioned sermon (Acts 2:14-36), Scripture says, Now when they had heard this they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do? Then Peter said unto them, Repent and be baptized everyone of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the holy Spirit. For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call (Acts 2:37-39). Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls. And they continued steadfastly in the apostle's doctrine and fellowship, and in the breaking of bread, and in prayers. And fear came upon every soul; and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles. And all that believed were together, and had all things in common; and sold their possessions and goods, and parted (distributed) them to all men, as every man had need. And they, continued daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread (mealtime eating) from house to house, and did eat their meat (food) with gladness and singleness of heart, praising God, and having favor with all people. And the Lord added to the church (out-called ones) daily such as should be saved (Acts 2:41-47). They went from house to house for fellowship witnessing Jesus' works.

The gifts of the Holy Spirit were obvious to all. Peter, in Acts 3, healed a lame man in the temple in a very visible miracle. This manifest demonstration of the power of the Holy Spirit aroused the anger of the Jewish Sanhedrin. And Peter took the opportunity to preach the gospel, And as they spake unto the people, the priests, and the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees, came upon them. Being grieved that they taught the people and preached through Jesus the resurrection from the dead. And they laid their hands on them and put them in hold (jail) unto the next day for it was even tide. Howbeit many of them which heard the Word believed; and the number of men was about five thousand (Acts 4:1-4). Then, Peter and the Apostles were persecuted by these Jews and forbidden to preach in the name of Jesus. After their release, Scripture says, And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul: neither said any of them that ought (nothing) of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common. And with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus: and great grace was upon them all. Neither

was there any among them that lacked: for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold, and laid them at the apostles feet: and distribution was made unto every man according as he had need (Acts 4:32-35). After the death of Ananias and Sapphira, for lying about their gift, Scripture says,

And great fear came upon all the church, and upon as many as heard these things. And by the hands of the apostles were many signs and wonders wrought among the people (and they were all of one accord in Solomon's porch. And of the rest durst (dared) no man join himself to them: but the people magnified them. And believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women.) Insomuch that they brought forth the sick into the streets, and laid them on beds and couches, that at least the shadow of Peter passing by might overshadow them. There came also a multitude out of the cities round about unto Jerusalem, bringing sick folks, and them that were vexed with unclean spirits: and they were healed everyone (Acts 5:11-16). Note the visible powers of the apostle—even healing by his shadow alone! Again, the council of the Jews hated the Apostles' teaching, but feared the people, and Gamaliel, a Pharisee, warned them that if this was of God they could not stamp it out.

There were some secular problems: when the number of the disciples was multiplied, there arose a murmuring of the Grecians (Hellenists) against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministration (food and shelter) (Acts 6:1). The Apostles allowed the followers to choose a servant: ...they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicholas a proselyte of Antioch: whom they set before the apostles; and when they had prayed, they laid their hands on them. And the word of God increased and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly; and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith (Acts 6:5-7). Eventually, despite working many miracles, Stephen, a believer full of faith and power, was stoned (Acts 7:59-60), and the persecution of believers continued. As a result, the believers were scattered over Judaea and Samaria, but even then they continued preaching the Word. Paul had persecuted the believers but was thoroughly converted on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:1-19).

Consequently, the out-called assembly was well-organized with apostles, elders, preachers, teachers, as the Holy Spirit directed. The early Acts-period believers were all Jews and proselytes, credentialed by their possession of the manifest gifts of the Holy Spirit. In Corinthians Paul says, But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal. For to one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom: to another the word of knowledge by the same Spirit; to another faith by the same Spirit; to another gifts of healing by the same Spirit; to another the working of miracles; to another prophecy; to another discerning of spirits; to another divers kinds of tongues; to another the interpretation of tongues; But all these worketh that one and selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as He will (1 Cor. 12:7-11). As Paul explained, God hath set some in the church (designated out-called ones), firstly apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues (languages) (1 Cor. 12:28-29). These believers received the Holy Spirit by the laying on of hands, after believing and being baptized (identification with Christ). Peter was the first sent to the Gentiles, to the house of Cornelius, a Roman centurion (41 AD) (Acts 10). The assembly in Judaea was surprised

that Peter would go into a Gentile house. But Peter related how God made him see His intent. Peter concluded saying, Forasmuch then as God gave them the like gift (of the Holy Spirit) as He did unto us, who believed on the Lord Jesus Christ; what was I that I could withstand God? When they heard these things, they held their peace, and glorified God saying, Then hath God also to the Gentiles (nations) granted repentance unto life (Acts 11:17-18). Paul made three missionary journeys to the nations, but his message was to the Jew first, then to the Greek (Rom. 1:16). Paul set up leaders as he went from one assembly to another: And when they had ordained elders in every church, and prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord on whom they believed (Acts 14:23).

In Acts 15 a council of the Jewish assembly was held to deal with applying Jewish law to the Gentiles, as initiated by the Pharisees who believed. The Apostle Paul returned from his first missionary journey (52 AD) and needed some points clarified. Peter defended Paul, and James and John supported him with a letter to these foreign assemblies. When Paul returned from his third missionary journey (59 AD), he reported on the glorious things God had done among the Gentiles. But Jewish brethren said to him, ...Thou seest, brother, how many thousands (Gk.-urias, tens of thousands) of Jews there are which believe and are zealous of the law. And they are informed of thee that thou teachest all of the Jews which are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, saying that they ought not to circumcise their children, neither to walk after the customs (Acts 21:20-21). This direct opposition to the council in Acts 15 shows the conflict in the church. Paul was incarcerated for two years in Caesarea, and then went to Rome (62 AD) where he declared the end of the Acts Period (Acts 28:28). This effectively ended the miracles done by Paul, the Apostles and others.

Despite what most religions teach, there are no "churches" today that can claim they are credentialed by the gifts of the Holy Spirit, as they obviously were in the Acts Period. The Kingdom of God will be the continuation of the Acts Period, where the believers of the Acts Period will be "out-called" for service to the government of God.

END

ISSUE No. MSB263
Published September 20, 2002

