

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 ACTS DISPENSATION

It is my conviction that ninety percent of all the confusion and contradictions that exist in Christendom are the result of ignoring the true character of that thirty-three year period of which the book of Acts is the history. Some are trying to live in this time as if the same administration and divine purpose prevailed today. Others are trying to live with it and spend much of their time denying its true character. And some are assiduously studying the revealed facts in order to know its distinctive character, and thus by contrast know more of God's will and purpose in the present dispensation.

Those who never make a penetrating study of the Word of God will never have any problems, questions, or difficulties in regard to it. They can exist for a lifetime on the few things they learned before they were ten years of age, and they do not want to add anything to the very little they already know. However, the constant reader and diligent student of the Bible who takes to heart what he finds there will discover that he is faced with numerous problems, questions, difficulties, and apparent contradictions. He then will yearn and even pray for the discovery of some major truth that will resolve all of these.

Familiarity with the Bible, a working knowledge of its pages, the ability to turn to any verse that comes to mind, is one of the greatest assets that can be possessed by the believer in Christ Jesus. I give thanks unto God for those circumstances in my life that could hardly produce anything else but a solid acquaintance with the inspired Scriptures. From this I know how precious to the Bible student are those great truths which do so much to make the Word of God a simple revelation of God's truth to His people. After gaining a good degree of familiarity with the New Testament and experiencing great frustration because of inability to find answers to questions, to solve

problems, and to resolve the apparent contradictions that increased in number with every reading, I came upon one great idea that did more to make the Bible a living and relevant book than anything I had ever discovered before. This was the recognition of the true character of the Acts period, and of the distinct program and purpose of God during that time. Related to this and in collocation with it is the great truth that Paul's declaration in Acts 28:28 marks a definite change in God's method of dealing with men and that his words there mark an administrative (dispensational) boundary line.

Failure to recognize this great truth makes it impossible to properly understand many portions of the New Testament. This is especially true of the six epistles written by Paul during this period. These are First and Second Thessalonians, First and Second Corinthians, Galatians, and Romans. All these take on the character of the time in which they were written. They contain many eternal truths which are not subject to change, and every word in them is beneficial for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for instruction in righteousness (2 Tim.. 3: 16), but they also contain dispensational truths which changed when that dispensation came to an end. For example see 1 Cor. 1:7; 5:5; 5:8; 6:4; 7:8, 27; Romans 1:16 (last clause); Rom. 3:1, 2; Rom. 15:27.

The foundation of the Acts dispensation was laid down by the Lord Jesus in Mark 16:15-18.

And He said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned. And these signs shall follow them that believe; In My name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; they shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover.

These are the words that set the character for the Acts period. They were fulfilled to the letter during that time and they describe the normal, daily experiences of those who believed. This is demonstrated by Mark's final words: "**And they went forth, and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following**" (Mark 16:20).

It is a constant trick of exposition to cast doubt upon these passages by saying that they are not found in the two most ancient manuscripts. This is only about one percent of the information available concerning this passage. The same is also true of John 8:1-11 and the entire book of Revelation. Before anyone casts a shred of doubt upon this portion of the Word of God, let them read with care Dean Burgon's monumental work *The Last Twelve Verses of Mark*, (recently reprinted by The Religious Book Discount House).

The chief characteristic of the Acts dispensation was that God - commissioned men went forth at His direction speaking a God inspired message, each word of which was given to them each time they spoke it (1 Thess. 2: 13), and which was always given in the mother tongue of those for whom it was intended. The word they spoke was always confirmed by signs that followed (Heb. 2:4), and when anyone believed his faith was accredited and confirmed by miraculous signs (Mark 16:17). This was the unvarying pattern of the Acts period. It was entirely different from God's method of dealing with men today.

About 650 years before the birth of Christ the prophet Habakkuk, anticipating the dispersion of Israel "among the nations" declared that a time would come when God would work a work of such incredible nature among the dispersed ones that His hearers would not believe it even if He told them of it (Hab. 1:5). His prophecy still awaits its final and definitive fulfillment, yet there can be no doubt but that there was a precursory fulfillment in the Acts period. The words of Paul are proof of this:

Beware therefore, lest that come upon you which is spoken of in the prophets; Behold, ye despisers and wonder and perish: for I work a work in your days, a work in which ye shall in no wise believe, though a man declare it unto you. Acts 13 :40, 41.

The Israelites who lived in the Acts period, those in Palestine as well as those scattered among the nations, not only heard what God was doing, they saw what He was doing (Acts 2:33). They were the objects of and the witnesses of a work of God that is unparalleled in human history. Thus that thirty-three year period stands apart and is different from all other periods of divine activity. In view of this the most careful study needs to be given to the divine purposes and activities that made it so unique. This is a sorely neglected study.

It has ever been the practice of theologians to minimize, depreciate, and

stultify the truth concerning the work that God was doing in the Acts period. This has been done both wittingly and unwittingly. The actual divine history of this time has been rewritten by commentators on the book of Acts. They are determined to see nothing in this period of time except the founding and development of what they call "the Christian church." They read this into every passage, they interpret it into every event, and they even translate so it will be found throughout this period. They actually minimize everything that belongs to this period of time, then they magnify everything in Christendom today so that both might meet on a common level and one be a continuation of the other. Thus, they insist that it was "the church" that began at Pentecost; then they make the organized religious establishments of today to be "the church" that began there - the outgrowth of what began at Pentecost.

They make the *ecclesia* of God (the outcalled ones) of the Acts period to be nothing more than church members; then they make the church members of today to be the outcalled of God. The divinely commissioned and inspired heralds of that time are made to be preachers and pastors; then the preachers and pastors of today are made to be divinely called and commissioned servants of God. Thus past positions are deflated and present positions are inflated so that they will appear to be the same.

An apostle, such as Paul, is made to be a "missionary" and his travels are made to be missionary journeys. The divinely-inspired proclamations of the apostles are made to be "sermons," and the chief purpose of these men is said to have been "the founding of churches." We are further told that all the great miracles that these men performed could also be performed by us if only we had sufficient faith. Yes, we are now being told that the God-given ability to speak in a foreign language was only an ecstatic and unintelligible babble, and that the head-jerking, eye-rolling, unintelligible uttering of meaningless sounds experienced today is the Biblical gift of tongues. Thus it is that the past is deflated and the present inflated, God's highest is made to be man's lowest and man's lowest is made to be God's highest, so that everything that happened in the Acts period is made to be the same as denominational programs today.

Even Dr. C. I., Scofield fell into this trap, giving in his reference bible such paragraph headings in the Book of Acts as "The first Church," "Peter's second Sermon," "The first missionaries," "Elders appointed in every church," "Founding of the church at Thessalonica," and "Founding of the church at Corinth." Thus a modern denominational and organized religious program is stamped upon every page of the Book of Acts when in reality it

cannot be found there.

In the years that I have given to the study of the history of the Acts period I have sought to saturate myself with the life and spirit of that time. These studies have brought the conviction that certain great truths related to this period stand out like mountain peaks and these need to be recognized and emphasized by all who would deal honestly with the history recorded in the Book of Acts and with the epistles that were written during this time. These mountain peaks of truth must not be bulldozed away.

At the close of the Acts period God had accomplished everything that He set out to do. No purpose is left unfinished, no project is incomplete. The message has gone forth to the ends of the earth, all Israel has heard, the remnant has been established, a company for His name has been called from among the Gentiles. The blade stage and the ear stage of the kingdom of God have run their course (Mark 4:28). The next stage of "the full grain in the ear," the manifest kingdom of God is ready to burst upon mankind. But it did not come.

God's kingdom purposes are held in suspension while He accomplishes a purpose which had never before been revealed. He will take time to write into the history of His long dealings with mankind a complete record of the grace that is inherent in His character. This is now being done in a dispensation of absolute grace. The truths that were applicable in the Acts period may or may not be applicable today. As Paul tells us in Philippians 1: 10, we must be testing the things that carry through (See Greek). We must study "rightly to divide the word of truth" (2 Tim. 2: 15).

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