

# MORE SEED & BREAD, ISSUE NO. 333

## A Tale of Two Churches

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Some dispensational groups teach that there were two churches in the New Testament during the Acts period. They teach that the apostle Peter led the “Jewish church” and the apostle Paul led something called the “Gentile church.” These two churches were supposedly operating simultaneously during the latter portion of the Acts period. These teachers say that the book of Acts shows as one progresses through it the Jewish church declining in prominence and eventually fading off the scene and the Gentile church rising up in prominence, eventually becoming the church we see today.

The evidence given to support this idea is based on the fact that the focus is on Peter’s apostleship to the Jews in early Acts but shifts to Paul’s apostleship in later Acts. Because of this, and the fact that Paul’s apostleship was to the Gentiles, it is concluded that Israel’s program was declining in prominence as the Acts period unfolded.

The word *church*, the translation of the Greek word *ekklesia*, is found 115 times in our New Testament, and the plural form *ekklesiai* is found 36 times. Please read **Seed & Bread #97- Ekklesia Meaning**; **Seed & Bread #87- Kaleo Meaning**; **Seed & Bread #115- Ekklesia Men**; and **Seed & Bread #120- Ekklesia Truth** for a full understanding of the Greek word *ekklesia*. God chose the word *ekklesia* to describe the out-positioned (Gk.- *ek*, out, Gk.- *kaleo*, called, designated, or positioned) Israelites in the Acts period chosen to lead in the Kingdom (government) of God.

While there were many churches (Gk.- *ekklesiai*) in Acts, they were all under one program, the program that offered forgiveness of sins and entrance into the Kingdom of God to all Israelites living at the time. This was true whether it was to those living inside the land of Israel through Peter and the eleven or whether it was to those living among the nations through Paul. While Paul’s apostleship differed somewhat from Peter’s, many dispensationalists struggle to understand that Paul’s apostleship was under the same Acts period constraint as Peter’s, which states that God’s message was to the Jew first. (Romans 1:16, 2:10).

The offer of forgiveness of sins and the Kingdom of God was just as valid for the ancestral Israelites living among the nations (Gk.- *ethnos*) as it was for those living inside the land of Israel. Translating *ethnos* “Gentile” forces the reader to see non-Israelites in a context where ancestral Israelites are very much in view. This word means “nations.” God sent Paul where Israelites lived among the nations. After Paul proclaimed the gospel to these Israelites, he was commissioned to also offer it to non-Israelites who were in his audience. Paul’s apostleship actually had very little to do with those we commonly call Gentiles or non-Israelites; the Biblical record of the Acts period shows that they were a very small company.

Romans 11 describes the relationship the non-Israelite believers had with God during the Acts period. Many balk at the idea, but this relationship was *through Israel!* Yes, even though it was now through faith in Christ and no longer through becoming circumcised and keeping the Law as a proselyte to Judaism (formerly the only means available for a non-Israelite to have a relationship with the God of Israel), they were being grafted into Israel's good olive tree and partaking of the root and the fatness thereof. (Romans 11:16-18). Important to note, while these non-Israelite believers were free in Christ and were not subject to the Law of Moses, they were *still* obligated to the restrictions of the decree that resulted from the Jerusalem council in Acts 15:23-29. They remained subordinate to and dependent on Israel's *ekklesia*. It is a mistake to associate the Acts period non-Israelite Gentile believing company with us, the company of believers in the Dispensation of Grace. The only way to hear the gospel in the Acts period was from someone who was sent (Gk.- *apostello*, authorized) by God to do so (Romans 10:13-15). The non-Israelite believers of the Acts period could not have heard from God, they could not have shown faith in Christ, and they could not have been obedient to God without Israel's program being fully on the scene and fully prominent. This all remained true until the Acts 28:28 proclamation that suspended the Kingdom of God.

If the book of Acts showed a rising of the non-Israelite "Gentile" program and a diminishing of the Jewish program, the content of the later portion of Acts should have little to nothing to do with Israelites, the Law, or Judaism, but this is not the case.

**Acts 20:16.** For Paul had decided to sail past Ephesus, so that he would not have to spend time in Asia; for he was hurrying to *be at Jerusalem, if possible, on the Day of Pentecost* (NKJV throughout). Partaking in the Jewish feasts was the exclusive right of an Israelite under the Law. Paul would not be making an effort to be in Jerusalem for the feast of Pentecost if it had been true that Israel's program was diminishing; Israel's program was still very prominently on the scene.

**Acts 21:20.** . . . You see, brother, how many *myriads* of Jews there are who have believed, and *they are all zealous for the law*,. . . This shows the success the apostleship of Peter and the eleven had within the land of Israel. The word *myriads* (Gk.- *urias*) is a word used to indicate that perhaps as many as one hundred thousand Jews had become believers . . . just within the city of Jerusalem. Just as God had always desired from His people, these Israelites are eager, excited, and motivated to keep the Law. We would not be reading about Israelites being zealous for the law as late as Acts 21 if it had been true that Israel's program was diminishing; Israel's program was still very prominently on the scene.

**Acts 21:23-24.** Therefore do what we tell you: We have four men who have taken a vow. Take them and be purified with them, and pay their expenses so that they may shave their heads, and that all may know that those things of which they were informed concerning you are nothing, but that *you yourself also walk orderly and keep the law*. The unbelieving Jewish leadership in Jerusalem had falsely accused Paul of teaching his followers to forsake the law. Paul had taken the vow of a Nazarite in Acts 18:18 (see Numbers 6:1-21). To help defend him against these accusations, fellow believers tell Paul to fulfill his vow along with four other men, showing his fellow Israelites that he too is zealous for the law. Paul would not be partaking in this Jewish ritual fulfilling the Nazarite vow as late as Acts 21 if it had been true that Israel's program was diminishing; Israel's program was still very prominently on the scene.

**Acts 28:8.** Paul went into him (Publius) and prayed, and *he laid his hands on him and healed him*. So when this was done, *the rest of those on the island who had diseases also came and were healed*. After being shipwrecked on the island of Malta, Paul is unharmed by the bite of a poisonous snake (Acts 28:1-

6). Paul then heals everyone on this island who had need. Manifest supernatural events are still on the scene. Signs, wonders, and miracles are intrinsically tied to Israel's program and the Kingdom of God (I Corinthians 1:22). These signs, gifts, and miracles would not still be on the scene as late as Acts 28 if it had been true that Israel's program was diminishing; Israel's program was still very prominently on the scene. **Acts 28:23-24. So when they had appointed him a day, many came to him at his lodging, to whom he explained and solemnly testified of the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus from both the Law of Moses and the Prophets, from morning till evening.** God sends Paul to Rome to proclaim Christ to the Jewish leaders in Rome. What is the subject of Paul's testimony? The Kingdom of God. What is the source of his testimony? He persuades them concerning Jesus from both the Law of Moses and the Prophets. The same dispensationalists who hold to the "two churches" doctrine like to appeal to something they call Paul's "mystery" doctrine, but there is no previously hidden doctrine proclaimed here or in Acts 26:22 where Paul proclaims the same thing before King Agrippa. Paul's last proclamation of the gospel in the Acts period contains no truths other than those that had long been available to the Jews within Judaism. (See Acts 24:10-14, 25:7-8, 26:4-8). This is because the secret (Gk.- *mysterion*) truths concerning the Dispensation of Grace had not yet been revealed to Paul; this happened after Acts 28:28. See Ephesians 3. Paul would not have testified *only* from the Law of Moses and the Prophets as late as Acts 28 if it had been true that Israel's program was diminishing; Israel's program was still very prominently on the scene.

The book of Acts shows no evidence of a shift from a Jewish program to a Gentile program. It is also important to recognize this truth concerning Paul's epistles written during the Acts period. Peter and the eleven had been commissioned as apostles to the Israelites inside the land of Israel. The next step in God's plan was to reach the Israelites that lived out among the nations. God enlightens Paul as to who Jesus Christ is and gives him a commission to the nations, to kings, and to the sons of Israel (Acts 9:15). All of these were reached through Paul's apostleship.

The *ekklesiai* (churches, if you insist) in the Acts period were all part of God's Jewish program as the Kingdom of God was becoming a reality upon earth. The doctrine of two churches during the Acts Period, one being Jewish and one being "Gentile," is a tale. This idea does not come from the Biblical record, but from men who insist that we call our churches today the continuation of the *ekklesiai* from Scripture. Biblically, there has never been such a thing as a Gentile (non-Israelite) church. The *ekklesiai* in the New Testament are the men and women whom God out-positioned with undeniable great authority (Gk.- *exousia*) and power (Gk.- *dunamis*) for His purposes. God's purposes were to gift, enlighten, and lead them so as to overcome their enemies and effectively guide Israel (and some non-Israelites) in the truth concerning Jesus Christ and the Kingdom of God.

