

SEED & BREAD

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

THE WORD OF TRUTH MINISTRY

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THE CHARISMATIC DISPENSATION

The failure of those who handle God's Word to distinguish between the charismatic dispensation and the present dispensation of the grace of God has resulted in great confusion. The Greek word *charisma* has to do with divine favor that is manifested as a special gift, and there is one period of time in sacred history that was so completely characterized by these gifts that it can well be called the charismatic dispensation. This period of time began with the resurrection of Jesus Christ and continued until Paul's great pronouncement recorded in Acts 28:28. It is the thirty-three years of which the Book of Acts is the history, and the foundation was laid for it in the words of the Lord Jesus to His eleven disciples (Mark 16:14).

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; and 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 (Mark 16:15-18).

A statement by statement examination of this passage will show that it was in full force and operative during the Acts period. It declares God's method of dealing with His people at that time. It produced the charismatic dispensation.

"Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature." This commission was performed and fulfilled to the letter in the thirty-three years that followed the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Some will quibble about this, but we who make a practice of taking God at His Word and thinking

accordingly will take our stand upon its statements. **"And they went forth and preached every where"** (Mark 16:20). **"Therefore they that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word"** (Acts 8: 4). These statements settle the matter for all who settle things by the Word of God. See Issue No. 13 for a fuller study of this commission.

"He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved." This is a divine declaration made with all the precision that characterizes divine things. And all this is ruined when men read the water ritual into the word *baptize*. There is a ritual called "baptism" and there is a reality called "baptism," and the ritual is not in view in these words. Very few know anything about the reality which is the most important meaning of the word *baptism*.

"And these signs shall follow them that believe." These words were spoken to the eleven disciples concerning all who believe. Not the apostles only but all who believed. The Greek word translated "follow" here is a forceful word that means to fully follow or to follow so as to be parallel with. These signs were the divine accreditation of the faith of all who believed during the charismatic dispensation. There were no secret believers in that day. No believer's life was "hid with Christ in God" as ours is today. Faith was a manifest thing that was evident to all.

"In My name shall they cast out devils." The divine activity at that time, the purpose that was being fulfilled, and the short time in which it was to be fully accomplished (Rom. 9:28) brought forth intense demonic activity in opposition to all that God was doing. The Lord said they would cast them out, and they did. When Philip, who was not one of the twelve, proclaimed Christ in Samaria, his word was confirmed by such miracles. "For unclean spirits, crying with a loud voice, came out of many that were possessed with them; and many taken with palsies, and that were lame, were healed" (Acts 8:7).

"They shall speak with new tongues." This gift was one of the great features of the charismatic dispensation. It was the God-given ability to speak another language as if it were one's native tongue. This happened first on the day of Pentecost when men out of fifteen or more countries bewilderedly confessed that they were hearing "every man in our own tongue wherein we were born" (Acts 2:8). These words tell us that the 120 believers on the day of Pentecost were able to freely and fluently speak seventeen languages and dialects. **"We do hear them speak in our tongues**

the wonderful works of God" (Acts 2:11).

"They shall take up serpents." Poisonous snakes abounded in Palestine, Syria, and Sinai. As men walked about bare-legged and in sandals, their feet and legs were the common targets of these vipers. Even before this they had been promised power to tread on serpents and scorpions (Luke 10: 19). Here they were told that they could pick up serpents. This was a most valuable and relevant power to those whose lives would be given to continuous travel, always walking, most the time sleeping in the open in snake-infested areas, wrapped only in their own garments or any other covering they carried along. The warmth of their bodies was a constant invitation to vipers to crawl in. If this happened they were in no danger. All they needed to do was pick it up and cast it aside.

A record concerning this is found in Acts 28:3-6. There we read that Paul and his traveling companions, shipwrecked on the Isle of Melita, were warming themselves at a fire that had been kindled. When he had gathered a bundle of sticks and laid them on the fire, a viper came out of the heat and fastened on his hand. The inhabitants of the island knew the poisonous nature of this serpent and expected that the venom would cause swelling at once and that in a short time he would be dead. But Paul shook off the serpent into the fire and felt no harm. This was a normal experience in the charismatic dispensation, and this incident, happening when it did is proof that the dispensation under which such things were normal extended to and was in full force until the close of the Acts period.

"And if they drink any deadly thing it shall not hurt them." Poisoning was the favorite 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" (Matt. 12:14) assassination by means of poisoning was probably 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 of the Acts period were the objects of the most malignant, Satan-generated hatred that men have ever known. Many would have gladly murdered them, thinking they were serving God by so doing (John 16:2).

It should be noted here that all other items in this declaration are prefaced by the positive words "they shall," while this one begins with the

hypothetical words "if they shall." There is no record that they did drink any deadly poisons, and if they did no one would have known it save those who had secretly administered it. The disciples in the charismatic dispensation were free from any danger of death by this common form of assassination.

"They shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover." Note it does not say "pray for the sick" as that is another matter. They laid hands on the sick, for they were performing a mediatorial service, and the sick recovered. Faith on the part of those who were healed was not a prerequisite. See Acts 28:7-9. There were no gimmicks, false claims, or 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

The commission recorded in Mark 16:15-18 is the divine constitution of the charismatic dispensation. It is not applicable to the present dispensation of the grace of God. It was the principles embodied in this declaration that gave the Acts period its peculiar character, one that is unique in all sacred history. The charismatic dispensation fulfilled its purpose, ran its glorious course and came to an end by Paul's pronouncement in Acts 28:28 (See Issue No. 11). This pronouncement brought an end to Paul's peculiar apostolic ministry, even though under new and special commissions he wrote seven epistles after that time.

Among all the gifted men of the Acts period there was none who exceeded the Apostle Paul. He was **"not a whit behind the very chiefest apostles"** (2 Cor. 11:5). His ability to heal the sick was demonstrated over and over. God even wrought special miracles by the hand of Paul (Acts 19: 11) so that **"from his body were brought unto the sick handkerchiefs or aprons, and the diseases departed from them, and the evil spirits went out of them"** (Acts 19:12). These miracles were the credentials of his apostleship and it is evident that they did not continue after Acts 28:28. There is no reference to such things in the epistles written after this time. These are Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, First Timothy, Second Timothy, and Philemon. It is in the epistles that we find positive evidence of the great change.

In Philippians 2:25-30 Paul speaks of Epaphroditus and describes him in such glowing and affectionate terms as "my brother, and companion in labor, and fellow soldier." The believers in Philippi had sent him with money for Paul, also to remain with him and look after his needs. However,

after his arrival in Rome he became ill with a sickness that Paul describes as being "nigh unto death," and if anyone should ever have been healed by Paul it was this man Epaphroditus. But there was no miraculous healing. His illness followed about the same course as ours do today. It took prayer, time, rest, and good care before he was able to return to Philippi.

Another clear evidence of a dispensational change is found in Paul's advice to Timothy set forth in 1 Tim. 5:23. **"Drink no longer water, but use a little wine for thy stomach's sake and thine often infirmities."** This passage has long been the security blanket of the so-called "social drinker," but he fails to see the real lesson it teaches. Epaphroditus was with Paul when he took sick, but there was no attempt made to heal him by laying on hands. Timothy was at a distance, but Paul did not send him a handkerchief. In the charismatic dispensation, poison could not hurt Timothy, but here the bad water is a definite threat. Paul's advice that he use a little wine for his "often infirmities" (Gk. *asthenia*) needs to be compared with his healing of "diseases" (Gk. *asthenia*) on the Isle of Melita. Paul's advice is a lesson in dispensational truth, and it was never intended to be encouragement to incipient alcoholics.

In just about the last word he ever wrote by divine inspiration, Paul confesses that he had left Trophimus at Miletum sick (2 Tim. 4:20). This would have been unthinkable during the charismatic dispensation. Not so under the dispensation of the grace of God.

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