

Spiritual Blessings



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“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ.” Eph. 1:3

Tongues-Speaking Today

Part 2. By David Tavender

My aim, in these two articles dealing with a complex topic, is to discuss some of the main issues of the matter, so that the reader may be in a better position to further explore the more detailed particulars of the subject.

In the previous article, we looked at the word “glossolalia”, which is the ability to speak in another language, or perhaps more than one language. Importantly, this ability is unlearned; thus, the ability to speak in another language, having been brought up in a multi-lingual household, or by studying another language at school, is not included under glossolalia. In a Christian context, God is said to give this ability. The following conclusions were put forward in Part 1: (a) In the Old Testament, prophecies associated foreign languages with Israel’s unbelief and disobedience. (b) In the New Testament, tongues were given as a gift to some believers, as a sign for the benefit of unbelieving Israelites. (c) Tongues in Scripture are always real languages. (d) What is supposed to be tongues-speaking today or in history, is not necessarily real language or God-ordained.

We could say much more about these points, but shall now turn again to 1 Corinthians, as there is more about tongues there than in any other book of the Bible. Let us learn more about how the gift of tongues operated in the early church, and compare what we find stated there with what we see practised today.

Spirituality

There is one myth that we should dismiss straight away – namely, that tongues show great spirituality. Speaking in tongues was commonplace among the believers of the Corinthian

church, but it wasn’t the hallmark of a spiritual church. Several times in 1 Corinthians, the same letter which addresses tongues-speaking among believers more than any other, we find great chastisement of those same believers for their immature and ungodly behaviour.

For example, they are referred to as being worldly or “carnal” (3:1); there were many contentious divisions within that church (1:10-12; 11:17); sexual immorality was present amongst them (5:1; 6:18); there was gluttony and greed at the Passover (11:17-33); and these are just a sample. Whatever else may be concluded about this issue, the view that tongues-speaking is manifested by godly and mature Christians and is a sign of a believer’s deeper relationship with the Lord, simply cannot be justified. It certainly wasn’t the case at Corinth.

I want now to look at selected verses from 1 Corinthians 12-14, and make a few comments concerning the role and operation of tongues-speaking.

Thoughts from 1 Cor 12

1 Corinthians 12 to 14 is a section “concerning spiritual gifts”. The gifts listed in 12:8-10 are wisdom, knowledge, faith, healing, miracle working, prophecy, the ability to discern spirits, tongues-speaking, and interpretation of tongues-speaking. Believers of the Acts Period all had at least one of these gifts (12:7), but that is not the case today. The operation of these particular gifts and abilities were unique to the period covered by the book of Acts (c.30 AD – c.62 AD),

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President's Word

Greetings to all of our readers around the world. Once again I must say thank you for your support and encouragement during 2010, and I hope that you have enjoyed our magazine this year.

December is Christmas time, and it is almost impossible to be unaware of it if you live in a country with a Christian heritage. However, it seems very unlikely that the Lord Jesus was born in December. It was more probably some time around September. Whatever our views are of this festival, may we make use of the occasion to be ever more mindful of the depth of meaning behind the verses - "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."; and "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1:1,14). The mysterious and glorious truths behind these verses are at the heart of what is often called the Christmas story. Soon we will be bombarded with humanistic statements in the secular media about "the true meaning of Christmas", but let us not forget that it was God who took the first step and, through His loving provision for us, "gave His Son".

Let us make this a time where we magnify our God, and give even more thanks for "His unspeakable gift" - the Lord Jesus Christ.

Conference audios available

Audio recordings of many of Michael Penny's recent Bible study messages (and one of Sylvia's) given in Australia are now available on audio CD, or in MP3 format. If you would like copies of the talks, please drop us a note or email me at admin@spiritualblessings.org. The audio CDs are \$1.00 each talk, or you may order all 17 talks on one disk in MP3 format (playable on a computer or DVD player) for just \$1.00. Please add \$4.00 postage to your order, and use one of the payment methods listed on page 12 in the "Donations" section. The messages available are:

- "James the Man and His Message" (9 CDs)
- "The Will of God in the 21st Century" (3 CDs)
- "Studying the NT Systematically" (1 CD)
- "3 Divisions of the OT & NT" (1 CD)
- "Introduction to Philippians 1" (1 CD)

"Philippians 3, Paul's Changed Attitude" (1 CD)

"Job" (Sylvia Penny - 1 CD)

Don't forget that you can also see a large range of Michael's writings by visiting our website page www.spiritualblessings.org/book/amp. It's certainly well worth a visit if you haven't checked it out yet.

Special Meetings in 2011

Our calendar for the upcoming year has not yet been finalised, but I can tell you that we are planning special meeting days in Northern Tasmania (early 2011), Brisbane (early 2011), the NSW Hunter region (mid 2011), as well as our Annual Conference in NSW (September 2011). We will keep you posted with more details when each of these is confirmed, and we hope to see you at some of our meetings in the new year.

Until next time, may the Lord be glorified by our walk, our witness and the study of His Word; and may I extend the BBFA's best wishes to you and your family for 2011.

David Tavender

Editorial

We made it! Six issues for the year. While this is our goal, it is sometimes difficult to achieve for various reasons. In this issue, we have part 2 of David's study on Tongues Speaking Today, a report on the Conference at Toukley, an article on pruning fruit trees, and a study I gave at our Rutherford Study Day, entitled "Development After Acts 28".

I'm happy to say that several readers have expressed appreciation of recent issues, the articles on Tongues Speaking Today, the Place of Pentecost and Resurrection a Vital Truth being particularly mentioned.

You won't need reminding from me that the year's end is upon us. How fast time flies by these days! I hardly become comfortable writing the date of one year, when another new year comes, and I have to start all over again. If that is my biggest problem, then I have little to complain about. All jokes aside, the truth is that I have a great deal to be thankful for, and my prayer is that all our readers will know, more and more, the abundant love of God in their lives, and that we will apply ourselves to His Word and service so that we will grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

Athol Walter.

cont from Pg. 1

during which 1 Corinthians was written (c. 50 AD). Such gifts were tied up with God's dealings with Israel, and, since God is not dealing with Israel differently to any other nation today (Ephesians 3:6), these gifts have ceased to be in operation for the present time.

Note that, in the list given above, tongues and the interpretation of tongues are actually placed last in the list (12:10). A similar list of gifts and God-given abilities may also be found later on in 12:28-30 where, once again, tongues and their interpretation are placed last. It is even suggested there that tongues is not one of the "best" gifts to be desired (12:31).

Whilst every believer during Acts had one of the gifts (12:7), not everyone was given the specific gift of speaking in tongues. In our English translations, this is quite apparent from the context; however it is even plainer in the Greek. In 12:30 we have the question, "Do all speak in tongues?". This is the Greek phrase, *me pantas glossais lalousin*. Most English translations leave the particle "me" untranslated; however, the Greek particle "me", as part of a question such as this, indicates that the answer is "no". In other words, we may accurately translate this phrase as, "Do all speak in tongues? No." Instantly, this ought to debunk the idea that, back then or today, all true believers speak in tongues.

Let us digress from 1 Corinthians for a moment to look beyond the Acts Period and consider a writing from the current dispensation. 1 Timothy was written around 66 AD, after Israel was set aside (c.62 AD). Ch. 3 lists a series of "musts" for overseers and deacons, including such qualities as being of good behaviour, able to teach, not being quarrelsome, and so on (vv.2-12). Interestingly, the ability to speak in tongues is not in this list. If all believers were required to speak in tongues today, especially mature believers in positions of leadership, surely this would be in the list. However, it never was the case that all believers were to display glossolalia. Apart from this, by the time this epistle was written to Timothy, Israel had been set aside as a special nation in God's plans, and since the gifts had been associated with Israel, there was no longer a place or a role for tongues. That situation has remained the same.

Thoughts from 1 Cor. 13

1 Corinthians 13 is the famous "love" chapter that has been read at many wedding ceremonies, including my wife's and mine 20 or so years ago. There are some wonderful words about love spoken of in this chapter, and there is much from it that we

can rightly apply (or try to apply!) to our own situation today. However, it will serve us well to remember that it is still part of that three-chapter section "concerning spiritual gifts" (12:1) in force during Acts Period times, and this is reflected in one or two phrases within the great chapter about love.

13:1 reads "Though I speak with the tongues of men and angels ..." (KJV/NKJV). The NIV's rendering is more accurate, reading "If I speak ..." The Greek particle in question here is *ean*, which is used in uncertain situations. Here it is more of a hypothetical suggestion, and could read as, "If I speak in the tongues of men, even if I spoke in the tongues of angels ..." – utilising a figure of speech we call hyperbole, or exaggeration in order to stress a point. The sentiment being expressed is, "Even if I speak in the most wondrous languages, but I have not love, I'm just making meaningless noise."

Tongues are often said to be angelic languages because of this verse. Interestingly, this is the only occurrence of the tongues of angels mentioned in Scripture, and if you read the verse carefully, you will notice that Paul doesn't even say he has spoken in an angelic language. It is perhaps a moot point, but everywhere else in the Bible, angels are recorded as speaking in the ordinary language of human languages anyway! One famous example is the angel who spoke to the women at the Lord's tomb. There he spoke to them in a language they could understand - "He is not here, He is risen" (Matthew 28:2-7) - and there are many other such instances.

In 13:8, we read that, whilst love will never fail, tongues will indeed cease at some stage. It is apparent that speaking in tongues was not intended to be part of Christian experience forever.

Thoughts from 1 Cor. 14

The first point to note from the 14th chapter, for readers of the KJV text, is that the word "unknown" has been inserted to form the phrase "unknown tongue". You will observe that it is in *ITALICS*, indicating that the word was not there in the original Greek text, and has been inserted by the translators. Often the translators insert words so as to make sense in English; in most cases this is justified, but this is not in this instance. As we have seen, tongues in Scripture were always known languages, and it is inconsistent to make the text read "unknown tongue" in this chapter alone. The word "unknown" should therefore be omitted in verses 2, 4, 13, 14 and 19.

14:1 begins with an exhortation to "desire spiritual gifts". This is an example of where we need to

distinguish between the commands and writings of the Acts Period (when such gifts were linked with Israel's special place before God), and those after the Acts Period (pertaining to the current dispensation, when Israel is not being treated by God any differently to the Gentile nations). Remember, all the gifts spoken of in 1 Corinthians 12-14 were specific to the Acts Period.

In the previous article, we considered the statement that tongues are a sign for unbelievers, as stated in 14:22. In the context of verse 21, we saw that there was a special significance of foreign tongues to the people of Israel, especially when in a state of unbelief, as evidenced by the quotation from Isaiah 28:11, 12. Please refer back to the first article for thoughts already discussed on this particular aspect.

From a reading of 1 Corinthians 14:27,28, it is apparent that, with the gift, came a responsibility of usage and that a measure of control was required. Tongues could be exercised or constrained at will amongst gatherings of believers, by those who had the gift. Note, however, that this gift was to be exercised in conjunction with an interpreter; if no interpreter was present, then the gift was not to be carried out at all in public.

The message of chapter 14 is summed up in vv. 39 & 40: amongst the gatherings, prophecy was actually a better gift to be sought. However, tongues had a place as well. More to the point though, all of the gifts were to be exercised in an orderly fashion.

Questions

Let's now ask ourselves a series of questions, comparing what we read in Scripture with how we see glossolalia practised among Christians today.

Question: Is tongues-speaking today always in legitimate languages?

Answer: No. Often the same word or set of syllables is repeated, interspersed with other syllables, the result being usually well-intentioned, but meaningless noise.

Question: Are interpretations of tongues-speaking today genuine and consistent?

Answer: In uncontrolled settings, how can such "gifts" be verified as either genuine languages, or accurate interpretations? The answer is that they can't be, and they usually aren't. In one research study (cited in "Our Firm Foundation" magazine 1996 Vol 11), a person claiming to have the gift of tongues was recorded speaking in tongues; this recording was

then played to several people each claiming to have the gift of interpretation, with the result that different translations of the same speech were offered. Likewise, D. A. Carson cites several instances of proven spurious interpretations under varying circumstances ("Showing the Spirit", p.87). Furthermore, it is not unusual to come across examples of an interpreter speaking for much longer than the tongues speaker they are supposed to be interpreting; for example, the message in tongues may have been twenty words long, but the interpretation was seventy words long. In addition, if the gift of tongues is operational today, why aren't there more people who interpret? They are vastly outnumbered by people who speak in tongues without interpretation.

Now compare all of that to Acts 2, where Jews coming from different regions around the Mediterranean all heard – and understood – the languages they recognised from their homelands. That was undeniably a working of God. In light of this, one can only conclude that the accuracy of the interpretations of tongues we often witness today is highly questionable, to say the least.

Question: Is Christian glossolalia always carried out in an orderly fashion?

Answer: Quite often it is not. It is not uncommon to witness several people speaking in tongues at the same time, contrary to the command of 1 Corinthians 14:27 to speak one at a time. Neither is it uncommon for glossolalia to go uninterpreted, which is contrary to the next verse (v.28) that commands, "If there is no interpreter, let him keep silent in the church".

Of even greater concern is ignorance of the exhortation of 1 Corinthians 14:40 to, "Let all things be done decently and in order". Sadly, we have all seen images of meetings where the exhibition of gifts, real or imagined, is disorderly and chaotic. Uncontrolled hysteria is sometimes seen – such as rolling on the floor, laughing uncontrollably, being "slain in the spirit", etc. Such behaviour is not even Biblical and is in fact quite contrary to the instructions of Scripture. It is one thing to act with godly intentions, and attempt to speak in tongues, unaware of the various conditions operating in the current dispensation; it is quite another to bring disrespect and scorn to our God and our faith through actions that are ungodly, irreverent and more akin to pagan customs than any instructions we find in the Bible.

Question: Is tongues-speaking instant or must a person first prepare themselves?

Answer: Glossolalia in Scripture required no preparation, yet plenty of advice is available today, via books, the internet, church leaders, etc., on what new Christians can do to start speaking in tongues. This is usually along the lines of, “relax and clear the mind”, “forget your natural language”, “let the Spirit take control”, etc. However, instructions and techniques like these can also be found in the teachings of Buddhism and Transcendental Meditation, whereas in Scripture, no such preparations are spoken of as being necessary.

Significantly, no one in the Bible is ever told to pray for the gift of tongues. Yet this, along with the fact that there are so many instructional aids available, shows there is often a great pressure for people new to the church, or the charismatic kind of meeting, to speak in tongues. Some claim that all should speak in tongues after a “second blessing”, thereby producing a more complete Christian. Scripture, again, knows nothing of this. So, what happens when a person makes a commitment to Christ, and is expected to speak in tongues but doesn’t? This failed expectation, and the pressure that often accompanies it, has “overthrown the faith” (2 Timothy 2:18) of many, and is one of the sadder results of misunderstanding the place of tongues-speaking today.

Question: Is glossolalia today God-ordained, or of some other origin?

Answer: This is not a simple question to tackle. Quite often, what we see claimed as being a gift of the Holy Spirit speaking in tongues through a believer, is really that person performing it themselves as a learnt behaviour or skill. In most cases, that person believes that the Holy Spirit is producing this phenomenon. Interpretations of such babblings that are inconsistent with Scripture, along with “prophecies” of great events which do not come to pass, do not originate from our God.

Should God decide to exercise this gift through someone for a specific purpose today, He will do it, but it certainly is not the normal course of events, given that tongues in Scripture were associated with Israel, and their position as a special nation in God’s dealings has been set aside for the present.

Another possibility is that what we see may sometimes be supernatural, but not of God. Of course, it is not always easy for us to establish the difference between something “Satanic”, something stemming from man’s fallen nature, or something done merely out of delusion or being misguided. There is plenty of Biblical evidence that the presence

of miracles and other wondrous phenomena is not proof in itself of God’s hand at work. Consider the imitation work of the Egyptian magicians in Exodus 7:22, and that Christ Himself spoke of some who will have performed many wonders in His name, yet His response will be “I never knew you” (Matthew 7:22,23). In Acts 16, we read of a lady who cried out “These men are the servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to us the way of salvation”; what she said was correct, but after a few days of this, Paul exorcised a demonic spirit from her. Glossolalia, miracle working, and things which have an appearance of being from God, are not always what they seem.

I am certainly not suggesting that every occurrence of tongues is demonic in origin, but leaving the mind open for anything to come out is not a healthy practice. If one “lets themselves go”, frees the mind and just utters whatever comes out, what comes out could actually be blasphemous or Satanic in origin. Alternatively, it could simply be that the person is leaving themselves open for the old nature to dominate. Either way, believers are never told to let their behaviour be led in this way; instead we read warnings to be on our guard and “watch” for ways in which we may be misled (Ephesians 6:18; 1 Corinthians 16:13; 1 Thessalonians 5:6).

Conclusions

There are many related issues we have not discussed in this article, but it will help the reader to keep in mind the following principles concerning tongues-speaking: (1) It was a sign to unbelieving Israel. (2) After Acts 28, God-ordained tongues-speaking was set aside. (3) Speaking in tongues is not unique to Christianity, and what may appear to be a working of the Holy Spirit in the form of glossolalia today, is unlikely to be God-ordained. If our God chooses to use this medium to carry out His will in some extraordinary circumstance today, who are we to say He shouldn’t? Yet because so much of what we see displayed has nothing to do with unbelieving Israel, and is contrary to the conditions and instructions set forth in 1 Corinthians 12 to 14, we believe these must be viewed as not from God.

***AS SO OFTEN HAPPENS, WHEN
ALL THE WORLD AGREES, IT IS
A CONSENSUS OF ERROR.***

Charles Ozanne.

BBFA CONFERENCE 2010

By Merilee Haegler

This year's Bible Study Weekend at Toukley, featuring Mike Penny as guest speaker, was a real blessing to those present. There were new friends and old from Melbourne, Tumut, Hervey Bay, Sydney, Gosford, Maitland, Brisbane and Newcastle. Attendance over the whole weekend was about sixty. Breaks between meetings provided times of rich fellowship. The Sunday night session was a light change from the studies, as Mike led us in an enjoyable evening of singing and games for the children. He taught us several lovely new songs that he'd brought from England.

Mike's topic was the book of James. In the ten sessions, he used the NIV Bible and it was a pleasure listening to Sylvia's lovely English accent as she read the various passages to us. (See photo next page.)

In the first study, Mike introduced us to Christ's earthly family and especially His brother, James, in the Gospels and Acts. This gave an interesting picture of the man behind the epistle. Though our Lord's family was ashamed of His behaviour during His ministry (Mk 3:21; Jn 7:2-10), yet before Pentecost, Mary and her sons were part of the company with the disciples, praying in the upper room (Acts 1:13-14). This shows that any previous doubts that they may have had about Jesus being the Messiah were gone and they were now firm believers. In fact, at Peter's release from prison, James is prominent in the Jerusalem church (Acts 12:11-17). Later, the events at the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15) suggest that James was the leader of the church there, apparently chairing the meeting, and making the final decision on the issue.

Turning to the book of James itself, we saw in verse one that it is written to the scattered people of Israel. Mike pointed out that there is no mention of Gentiles in this epistle, which suggests that James was the first NT book to be written. When Peter spoke at Pentecost, three thousand Israelites were saved (Acts 2:41) and by Acts 4:4 this number had swollen to five thousand. These many converts returned to the fifteen countries they came from (Acts 2:9-11). It's reasonable to think that churches would have been established in these areas and that these were the ones to whom James wrote.

The primary reason for this letter, Mike said, was to strengthen the people in their hardships and

sufferings (Jam 1:2-3,12; 2:6; 5:11,13). We can see the climate of the day in Acts, which shows different trials of believers: Peter and company before the scribes and Sadducees; Stephen's stoning; and Paul enduring many things. It was the leaders of the Jews, the rich and influential, who opposed the Christian witness. James encouraged the persecuted to stand firm in the Lord (Jam 5:4-11). It is in the light of these troubles that James refers to wisdom in chapter 1:5-8. He was reiterating Christ's words of Lk 21:12-17 where He says that though believers suffered for His name, they weren't to worry because, "I will give you words and wisdom that none of your adversaries will be able to resist or contradict". Mike emphasized the context of these words, pointing out that what James said was not an open ended promise for anyone, but was for a specific people in a specific situation.

Though this book is directed to Jews of that time, Mike brought out that there is much fundamental truth in it for us to learn. This is seen in verses 19-27 of ch. one, which speak of anger and moral issues. We are to live a Christ-like life rather than a carnal one. We must continually make sure that we are pleasing our Saviour and not getting side-tracked by our old desires. This passage finishes with a thought-provoking definition of pure religion: "To look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep one's self from being polluted by the world."

Chapter 2 has two sections. The first deals with favouritism, discrimination and judgment. Mike said that James 1:9-11 contrasts the rich and poor in the Jewish communities. While the rich leaders oppressed and cheated those under them (ch. 5:1-6), the average Jews bowed and scraped to the rich and also exploited poor folk, even though they themselves suffered at the hands of the wealthy. James calls those showing partiality, "law breakers" (v. 9), which to a Jew was a very serious allegation. He says they broke the most basic command, namely, "Love your neighbour..." (v. 8). While we certainly can learn from this, verse 13 is very judgmental, "Judgment without mercy, in fact, will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful..." This is strong evidence that James' epistle was indeed written to Jews in the Jewish dispensation, before the age of grace was in effect.

The second section of this chapter addresses faith and works. Though Abraham was justified by faith, his faith was demonstrated to all by what he did. Abraham believed God that Isaac was his heir and that God could raise his son from the dead (Heb 11:19). So he was willing to sacrifice Isaac and, in this way, he gave witness to his faith. Rahab is another example. Her faith was shown by her action in aiding the Israelite spies. All in Jericho knew the power of Israel's God and trembled (Josh 2:9-11), but only a prostitute had saving faith that was demonstrated by what she did. James was encouraging the Christian Jews to good works so that their actions would be above criticism. This should also be our aim.

James' teaching on taming our tongues continues in this vein of works. Personally, I found this most challenging. We didn't need Mike to tell us that our words are the hardest things to control. But he warned us that what we say can set up all kinds of disaster. He asked us if the words that come out of our mouths are completely at odds with what we profess. The example in James is criticism of others. Is our worship made a lie by the evil we wish on our fellow man? Sylvia read Phil. 2:3, "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves." Here again it comes down to good deeds. To paraphrase James 3:13 and make it applicable to us today, 'Let us show our salvation by our good life, by deeds done in humility'. In his exhortation to good works, James gives us a lovely definition of wisdom: it "is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere" (3:17). So much depends on our words!

Ch. 4 also focuses on the conduct of James' readers. He told them to stop their quarrelling and fighting, to repent of their worldly ways, and God would help them. Mike applied the lesson to us, because we also need unity among believers. As Phil 2:2 says, "Be likeminded, having the same love" to one another.

However, the asking and receiving of James 4:3 is NOT for us today. Mike stressed that this was specifically directed by Christ to the conditions of that day. Our Lord's words in Matt 6:25-34 were about the necessities of life – food, drink and clothing. We have to realize that these commodities weren't readily available back then. Christ's teaching was based on Deut. 28 where God promised Israel that, if they faithfully kept the law, He would bless them in this way. And if they didn't, they would be cursed.

Mike commented that, today, we don't follow the earthly Christ in robe and sandals, but the glorious, ascended Lord Christ Jesus as depicted by Paul. The last verse of James 4 again reminds us that this passage is to Jews in its reference to sin: "Anyone, then, who knows the good he ought to do and doesn't do it, sins".

Prayer For The Sick

The well known prayer for the sick in James 5:14, 15, is likewise dispensational. Mike explained how that today, our illnesses are due to the natural law of 'what you sow, you reap'. But when James wrote, sin brought judgment, which in individuals took the form of sickness. Again, this is Old Testament laws and curses (Deut 28:58-59). Some examples are: Herod Agrippa, eaten by worms (Acts 12:19-23); Elymas, the sorcerer, struck blind for a time (Acts 13:8-11); and the drunkenness and gluttony that Paul warned against in 1 Cor 11:20-31, which resulted in believers becoming sick and even dying. So James, in his letter, encouraged the Christians to pray for those under judgment and to see them repent and be healed, and sometimes even saved from death (Jam 5:20). Like John 20:22-23, where the Lord Jesus said, "If you forgive anyone's sins they are forgiven", the forgiveness spoken of here is not to salvation, but unto health. We also see Christ linking forgiveness and healing in Mk 2:3-12 when He healed and forgave the paralytic man.

In summing up, Mike brought into clear focus the fact that James is strongly dispensational. There are warnings of judgment; they expected the imminent return of the Lord; the law is emphasized and there are references to previous passages in both the Old and New Testaments. We learnt new aspects of old 'promises' that, I for one, used to claim, and were challenged again to take action and live a life worthy of our Lord.



Developments After The Close Of Acts

By Athol Walter

“Then Paul dwelt two whole years in his own rented house, and received all who came to him, preaching the kingdom of God and teaching the things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ with all confidence, no man forbidding him.” Acts 28:30, 31.

While, at first glance, they seem to be light on detail, these last two verses of Acts give us vital information about what happened after Paul’s day-long conference with the Jewish leaders of Rome. Consider the differences between verse 23 and verses 30 & 31:–

Acts 28:23	Acts 28:30,31
So when they had appointed him a day, many (Jews) came to him ...	Then Paul dwelt two whole years in his own rented house, and received all who came to him ...
... to whom he explained and solemnly testified of the kingdom of God...	... preaching the kingdom of God ...
... persuading them concerning Jesus teaching the things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ ...
... from both the Law of Moses and the prophets...	...with all confidence, no one forbidding him.

The differences are significant! Firstly, note that in both cases, Paul is preaching about the Kingdom of God. That, however, does not mean it is all one and the same thing, for we must remember that the Kingdom of God is very wide and contains a number of sub-sections. In v. 23, where Paul testifies to the Jewish leaders, he tries to persuade them from both the Law of Moses and the Prophets that Jesus is Israel’s Messiah, so he is dealing with the part of God’s Kingdom that applies to Israel.

But notice how different his message is in those last two verses. No longer is it Jesus, but the Lord Jesus Christ, and there are no quotes from the Law and Prophets. These differences, we believe, are quite deliberate on the part of the Holy Spirit, and so require our careful attention. We have in these last two verses, a significant pointer that once Israel was set aside, Paul had a new and different message to preach, which is not to be found in the Law or Prophets.

So God’s response to Israel’s rejection of the second offer of Jesus as their Messiah, was to reveal a new dispensation – the Dispensation of the Mystery (Secret is the better translation) – which has a new Company associated with it – the Church Which Is

His Body. While that is a simple statement on the face of it, a number of implications arise from God’s action that must be looked at carefully.

Before we do that, however, I want to outline what the believers of that time did when they were confronted with Israel’s defection, for the more we know of that, the better we will understand the situation that confronts us today. Space limitations force me to be brief.

1. Believers turned away from Paul. Consider these two verses:–

Acts 19:10:– “And this continued for two years, so that **all who dwelt in Asia** heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks.”

2 Tim. 1:15, “This you know, that **all those in Asia have turned away from me.**”

2 Timothy was Paul’s last epistle, written several years after 1 Timothy. Asia, by the way, refers to parts of modern Turkey. Don’t miss the significance of these two verses. All those who had once accepted Paul later turned away from him. There is more here than turning from the man. They also turned from his message. Why? The only difference is the

radically new message Paul was preaching, and they apparently refused to accept it.

2. **Roman persecution increased.** Another change that occurred soon after the close of Acts was the Roman attitude toward Christianity. As it separated from Judaism, it became illegal in Roman eyes.

3. **The work of the Judaizers.** These Jewish Christians believed that Gentile converts should fully observe the Mosaic Law. In spite of the decision of the Jewish Council (Acts 15), they travelled around the Churches that Paul had established, undermining his work. These attacks did not stop at the end of Acts, (see 1 Tim. 3–7; Titus 1:10, 11; Titus 3:9), and I suspect that the Judaizers eventually won the hearts and minds of many believers.

4. **The Romans destroyed much of Jerusalem, including the Temple, in AD 70.** Because believers had turned away from Paul's new teaching, they could not understand why this calamity had been allowed by God. So, over a period of time, Christians rationalized the situation, and came to believe that the Church had replaced Israel in God's plans, and had become the New Israel. This has been the traditional Church line for nearly 2,000 years. But tradition is not the same as Truth, and the Truth is found in the seven last epistles of Paul, written after the close of Acts.* These epistles have been generally ignored and misunderstood by the Church.

Is There Any Support For This Claim? Yes, Church History. There is a gap of silence of about 50 years from the close of the New Testament to any more Christian writings. These are not inspired Scripture, but are letters and commentaries etc. by various Christian leaders, called Church Fathers. The sad truth is that not one of them shows any understanding of the Secret revealed by Paul in Ephesians and Colossians. They also show no understanding of the basic doctrine of justification by faith without works. Their writings show that they had gone back into a mixture of Gospel and Law. Can you see the work of the Judaizers here? Christianity descended into what might well be called her Dark Ages! And what brought light once again? The Reformation, when some in the Church turned back to Paul and his teaching!***

God's Action After Acts

Let us now think about God's response after the close of Acts. The day-long conference with the Jewish leaders in Rome was Israel's final chance.

After that, Israel became 'LO-AMMI', a condition they are still in today. (LO-AMMI is Hebrew for 'not My people').

The Secret that God then revealed is detailed for us especially in Ephesians and Colossians. Please carefully read Eph. 3:1–12. Paul was allowed to reveal the Secret God had kept hidden in Himself from before the foundation of the world **only after Israel had been set aside**. It did not – indeed could not – concern the nation Israel, for they, as a nation, were now divorced from Jehovah.

...none of the early Church Fathers show s any understanding of the great foundational truth of justification by faith without works.

Let us apply ordinary logic to these facts. If, as Paul tells us in Eph. 3:9 and Col. 1:26, this new message had never been revealed before that moment in history when he declared it, and

if it had hitherto been a secret that God had kept hidden in Himself, then we will look in vain for it in the Law of Moses, the Prophets, or in any part of Scripture written prior to the end of Acts, including Paul's earlier epistles! That is why there is no reference to Law or Prophets in the last two verses of Acts 28. He could not refer to what is not there. The final step in this logical pathway is that the Dispensation of the Mystery and the Church, the Body of Christ, are to be found **only** in the last 7 epistles of Paul. *

So What Changed After Acts?

Some things disappeared, and some new things appeared. I am not talking about basic doctrinal truth here, such as salvation through the sacrifice of Christ. Those truths remain unchanged, but dispensational truths have changed. First some negatives.

1. **No signs.** Signs and miracles are for Israel. The Lord said more than once to His Jewish audiences, "If you don't believe what I say, believe Me for the works I have done." His miracles fulfilled Scripture and should have been enough to convince the Jews. We could argue at length about the validity of so-called signs today, but I will simply make the statement that we do not see any signs today as operated in the years of both the Gospel times and the Acts. There is ample evidence in the NT itself that the signs stopped after the close of Acts.

2. **The Jew is no longer first.** In the early parts of Acts, the witness was to Jews only. After the conversion of Cornelius, the witness was to the Jew first, then Gentile. But since the end of Acts, Christian witness is made without any regard to nationality

whatsoever. I have never known any Christian evangelists in my lifetime go to Jews before they preached to Gentiles. Have you?

3. Gentile believers are not wild olive branches grafted into Israel's olive tree as they were in the Acts period. Gentiles were brought into the church at that time to stir up the Jews to accept their Messiah, even through jealousy. (See Rom. 9 & 10) Desperate times call for desperate measures! It was always God's plan that Gentiles were to be blessed, but Israel had to be saved first. It was Gentile conversions happening before all Israel was saved that confused the Jewish believers. Dear Reader, how many Jews were stirred up when you were saved? I doubt that any Jew even knew about it. It looks like something has changed, doesn't it? Now, let's look at some of the positive things.

1. The Body of Christ was chosen at a different time to the other callings. Eph. 1:4, "... chosen in Christ **before the foundation of the world.**" This phrase occurs only three times in the NT. Two of those refer to Christ Himself, and the third one is this Ephesians reference. There are two other phrases that are similar, but different in one important aspect. They are '**from or since the foundation of the world**'. Please take the time to compare the following references.

From or Since:

Matt. 13:35; Matt. 25:34; Luke 11:50, 51; Heb. 4:3; Heb. 9:26; Rev. 13:8; Rev. 17:8.

Before: John 17:24; 1 Pet. 1:20; Eph. 1:4.

Two other refs. that should be added, although they use a different phrase are: 2 Tim. 1:9. "... given to us in Christ Jesus before time began (Gk. before age-times)." Titus 1:2. "... in hope of eternal life ... promised before time began (Gk. before age-times).

While these last two references are not quite the same as 'before the foundation ...', both phrases take us back before the ages, i.e. long before Israel and the Kingdom became predominant in God's plan.

The words 'before' and 'since' have opposite meanings. Surely it is conclusive that nothing to do with Israel or the Kingdom is said to be **before** the foundation of the world. Israel and her promised blessings are firmly planted in the era referred to as **from or since** the foundation of the world. The only company that is said to be chosen before the foundation of the world or before age-times is the Church which is His Body, a calling that was not

revealed anywhere in Scripture until after Paul spoke to the Jewish leaders in Rome in AD 62.

And, with the foundational truth of justification by grace without works, this truth of the Secret was lost when believers turned away from Paul, the Lord's apostle to Gentiles.

2. The new Company linked with the Secret has a new name, one that had not been heard before - the Body of Christ. Many believers think that 1 Cor. 12 teaches about the Body of Christ. No, there we have the human body used as an illustration of diversity within unity. Where our translations read, You are THE Body of Christ, the Greek actually says, You are A body of Christ (v. 27). But a more important point is this. Where is the Fullness in 1 Cor. 12? In Eph. 1:23 the Body of Christ is said to be the fullness of Christ who, in turn, fills all in all. There is not a whisper of the body as the fullness of Christ in 1 Cor 12.

3. The Lord has a new title in Paul's new revelation. The Head of the Body. This title occurs only after the end of Acts.

4. The new Church, the Body of Christ, has a different goal to the believers in the Acts period. That goal is to grow up into the full stature of the new man.

Eph.2:15. "... so as to create in Himself one new man from the two ..." Notice the words. "One new man from the two". Which two? The two groups of believers that were different in the Acts period, i.e. the Jewish group and the Gentile group. But once Israel was dismissed, then God revealed His hitherto secret plan for this new group in which there are no differences such as Jew or Gentile at all. This is the one new man.

In Eph. 4:13. Paul says that we are all to grow to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. Can you see the consistency here? The new company's title is the Body of Christ. Then, as the Body of Christ, he tells us that we are to grow up to maturity in this new man that has been created. To make sure you understand the point here, let me quote v. 13, and change just one word. "Till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect **lady**, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ."

We know immediately that 'lady' is the wrong word, which shows that the Church the Body is not the Bride. Actually it is even more specific, because the word for 'man' in the Greek is the word for husband! In plain words, the Body of Christ is part of the

Bridegroom, while the Company of believers during Acts is called The Bride of the Lamb. And the wedding has not yet taken place!

5. There is a new sphere of blessing. Eph. 2:4–6.

“But God ... raised us up together (i.e. with Christ) and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus.” Eph. 1:20 – 23 tells us that the heavenly places are at the right hand of God far above all. In Hebrews (an Acts epistle), Christ is said to have passed through the heavens and is above the heavens, but it says nothing about any believer being with Him in heaven.

In Matt. 5:5, the Lord told His Jewish hearers that the meek would inherit the earth. Do you think that is the same as being seated in the heavenly places at the right hand of God? If it is, then words have lost their meaning!

In the Acts period, Paul told the Galatians that their hope was the New Jerusalem. “Ahah,” you might think, “that’s in heaven.” True, but keep reading. Rev. 21 tells us that the Heavenly City comes *down out of heaven onto the new earth*, which is not the same as being seated at the right hand of God with Christ. Now, you may choose to lump these things together and say they all mean the same thing. That’s your prerogative, but at least give some thought to whether you are rightly dividing the Word of Truth when you do that.

Dear Reader, will you emulate those early Christians who turned away from Paul? Or will you be like the Bereans in Acts 17, who listened to Paul with open minds, and then checked out what he said in their own Bibles? As a consequence, we are told, many believed. I pray that very thing will happen again as a result of our study of God’s Word together.

** (The 7 epistles Paul wrote after Acts 28:28 are: Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Philemon, 1 Timothy, Titus, 2 Timothy.)*

*** (Details of the centuries immediately following the close of the Apostolic period can be found in the book, ‘The Early Centuries and the Truth’, by Stuart Allen. It is available from our Book Agent. See p.12 for contact details.)*

(This article is a slightly abridged version of a study given at the Day Study Conference at Rutherford, Maitland in July this year.)

Matthew’s Gospel offers a Gentile ‘crumbs from Israel’s table’, but when Paul reveals the new Dispensation after Israel is set aside, the Gentile is offered ‘all spiritual blessings in the heavenlies.’

Pruning Fruit Trees

Adapted from the writings of Charles Welch.

A garden teaches many lessons, and the pruning of fruit trees is by no means the least helpful. While the purpose of pruning may not be clear to a non-gardener, it is true to say that every cut of the expert pruner’s knife is purposeful and good.

Applying this to our spiritual experience, it is true to say that every piece of pruning done by the heavenly husbandman, is for our good and His glory. As an experienced gardener prunes a branch only after careful thought, the Lord also prunes His plants – ourselves – with great care and tender concern.

Why, then, do we prune? (1) to produce the most fruit-bearing wood. (2) to give that wood as much air and light as possible. (3) so that the resulting fruit shall be placed for easy picking. These three reasons for pruning need no alteration of wording to speak to us of our own life and experience.

The Lord expects us to produce fruit, and just as the pruner’s knife cuts away much that looks pleasant to the eyes, so the Lord has to remove much that, to the eye of the flesh, seems attractive and necessary. An experienced pruner knows, however, that unwise pruning, instead of producing fruit-bearing wood, will produce twiggy growth that robs the tree, depriving it of air and sunshine.

God looks at us as we look at our trees. He sees that some mental activity, or involvement in worldly or social affairs will be unfruitful, possibly spoiling the remaining fruit, and so He prunes. We should keep this in mind when we suffer the cutting off of some fancied good, some hoped-for success – the Lord is pruning. He desires fruit. Air and sunlight are necessary not only for ripening fruit, but also for ripening the wood on which the fruit shall form. Remember – *fruit only grows on ripened wood.*

Another truth that applies in both the natural and spiritual spheres is that all trees are not alike. Some trees bear fruit along the whole branch, while others have fruit only at the tips. This means that different pruning methods should be used.

Understanding this should prevent us from jumping to the hasty conclusion that all other believers’ experiences should match our own. The Lord said that His Father is the Husbandman, and we can rest assured that He will prune each one according to the individual needs of ourselves and His glory.

(From the Berean Expositor, Vol.9, p. 47)

Are you aware?

Are you aware that the "bride of Christ" is not a Scriptural expression?

Rev. 21:9, 10 read, "... Come hither I will shew thee the bride the Lamb's wife. And he carried me away in the spirit to a great and high mountain, and shewed me that great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God".

The correct term is "the bride, the Lamb's wife" which is a reference to the New Jerusalem. Remember that God's word is consistent and logical.

Ron Hodge.

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You are invited to attend

Regular Bible study meetings are held in Brisbane, Sydney, Newcastle and Maitland. Meetings include some singing, prayer, and a Bible study, approx. 45-60 mins. in length, followed by refreshments. Questions and comments about the study are encouraged. These meetings are free of charge and everyone is welcome.

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231 Andrew Rd, Greenbank.
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4th. Sunday each month 3pm.
45/45 Philips St., Cabarita.
Group Co-ordinators: Peter & Anne Ward, (02) 9743 3452.

Newcastle:

Every Monday, 7:30pm.
34 Aroona St., Edgeworth.
Group Co-ordinators: David & Janelle Tavender, (02) 4950 6708

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