

Spiritual Blessings



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Wonderful Words Of Life (6), Sanctification

By Athol Walter

I recently came across a quote that fits our studies in the various aspects of salvation very well.

“Atonement needs a priest; reconciliation needs a mediator; redemption needs a kinsman-redeemer who can pay the required price.” And we can add that the Lord Jesus Christ fills each role completely. How can we ever adequately praise Him or thank Him enough?

Now, having been redeemed by Christ and accepted by God on the basis of the atonement Christ made to God, and knowing our sins are forgiven and that we are justified in His sight, we are now able to move on into a life of service for and communion with God, experiencing the blessing of sanctification.

There are widely differing opinions about sanctification in Christian circles, and I think that, as with other doctrinal subjects, some of the confusion comes from an emphasising one aspect of the subject over others.

The first thing to note is that there are at least two sides to sanctification, viz. the part that God does, which as with all His work on our behalf, is the major part, and then the part that we must do. Another way of saying this is that we are to bring our lives into line with what He has done for us. Much teaching in Christian circles focuses on our part, which is understandable and indeed, necessary, but often, not enough attention is given to what God has done for us in the matter of sanctification. This, I believe, leads to lop-sided teaching and practise. (If you would like to debate any of these points, you could always write a letter to the Editor!)

What is Sanctification?

The words sanctify and sanctification do not occur very often in the New Testament, but the list expands if we add such words as holy, holiness, purge from

sin etc. The Old Testament does better in this regard, and that is possibly because much is said about the sanctifying of Israel and the Tabernacle and their service for God. There are, as we will see, references about God’s sanctification also.

As I let my mind wander over the subject, it seemed to me that sanctification is the goal of God for all His people. It makes no difference whether a child of God lives under the dispensation of law or grace or mystery, or whether the sphere of blessing is the promised land, the New Jerusalem or Heavenly places far above all, we are all saints, that is, sanctified.

I did not always know that the words saint, sanctify, holy and holiness are all related words. We have these different words because they come into English from different languages. The modern usage of saint in some denominations is misleading. Some think that a saint is a very special person who has shown a large measure of holiness in daily life, and so they have been officially given the title of saints.

That is not the New Testament usage, however. Every believer is called a saint, because in God’s sight, every believer has been reconciled, ransomed and redeemed, reckoned righteous and made spotless by the blood of our Saviour. In other words, ALL believers are sanctified. That is our standing with God through grace by faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. But the actual state that any of us may be in at any given moment could be very different, which is our side of the equation, and thank God, He has

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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



The President's Word

Greetings once again to all of our friends across Australia and the globe. We are almost halfway through the "new" year already, and there's plenty taking place. Here is a brief selection of what's been happening, and what's on the agenda for the next few months.

Bibles For Malawi

The gift of God's Word is sometimes one that is taken for granted in our country, but it is one that's treasured very highly in the southern African nation of Malawi. Last year we made an appeal to help us provide Bibles for our Christian friends there, and I am pleased to say that, through your help, the BBFA was able to supply them with 240 Bibles. These Bibles were delivered in March to a rural village, along with pamphlets in the local language to help the readers find their way through the Scriptures. We, along with our good friend, Pastor Amos Mukoko in Malawi, say a big "thank you" to everyone who helped.

Sydney studies

2008 has seen a new venue for our Sydney studies, and Peter Ward is giving some thought-provoking studies on the third Sunday of each month. If you live in or visit the Sydney area, why not drop in for a great afternoon. Details are on page 12, along with details of all of our regular Bible Study meetings.

Two Special Events

Coming up very soon are two special events - one is an introductory Bible Study Day at Charlestown (in the Newcastle area) on Saturday May 31st. The other is our Annual Brisbane Bible Study Weekend, June 7th and 8th. Times and venues are on page 12, and both of these events are free.

Annual Conference

Our Annual Conference will be held again this year at Camp Toukley, on the NSW Central Coast. Three days of Bible Study and great Fellowship suitable for all of the family. Start planning ahead to join us - September 20th, 21st, 22nd, 2008.

Proposed Name Change

As mentioned in the last issue, the Berean Bible Fellowship of Australia (BBFA) is considering a change of name as there are several Christian groups, not associated with us, who also use the word "Berean" as part of their title. A name change is not a certainty, however, and the BBFA Committee is hoping to put this issue to the vote at our Annual General Meeting in September. There is a certain amount of preparation to be done before then, so, if you have any views on this

issue, please get in touch with us very soon via one of the contact addresses on page 12 and let us know what you think.

Web Site

The BBFA's web site continues to generate good levels of interest. Visit us today at www.spiritualblessings.org and see why we think this an excellent site for the serious student of the Scriptures. It's packed with hundreds of great Bible Study articles, charts and online books covering a vast array of topics, as well as plenty of Christian resources, back issues of Spiritual Blessings, and more. We are regularly adding new features, too, so if you haven't been there lately, it's time for another visit.

David Tavender



Editorial

It is Autumn here in the southern hemisphere as I write. and we have beautiful Autumn colours in many trees and shrubs.

Autumn is my favourite season - the days are still warm, but the nights have cooled off, and as I handle cold weather better than the heat, I quite look forward to the approach of winter.

All this reminds me of the passage of time, which is the subject of the study commencing on p. 6. The passing of time is not so obvious in the Book of Acts, but the date and order of events is vital to a proper understanding of the message of Acts. Fortunately, there are several events in Acts that can be pinned down accurately on the calendar, and that helps us to construct a reasonable time frame.

Acts is a historical book, telling us about vital and pivotal events in God's dealings with Israel, and it is all too obvious that Christendom at large has taken the wrong turn by ignoring this.

There is also another article in the Wonderful Words series, this one being on Sanctification. I have a feeling that we may be coming to the end of this series, but I won't be dogmatic about it yet. I am glad to be able to say that readers have appreciated these articles.

Have you any subjects that you would like dealt with? Any questions that you would like answered? If so, get in touch and we will do our best to meet your requests.

Athol Walter.

cont from Pg. 1

made provision for the weakness of our sinful flesh.

What does sanctification mean?

The word comes to us through French, behind which is the basic Latin word. Sanctificare = sanctus 'holy', and ficare 'to make, and the meanings that have grown out of this are: to make holy; to make free from sin or purify; to set apart as holy or to consecrate.

The Hebrew Word - QADASH

The Hebrew word for sanctify is QADASH, the primary idea of which is cleanliness. This has a moral and ceremonial sense as well as a practical one.

The first occurrence of sanctify in the Bible is very helpful. It is in Genesis 2:3.

'God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it.'

Obviously, God set the seventh day apart. He made it special, different, sacred. We need to realise that while inanimate objects can be sanctified, i.e. set apart and only used for sacred purposes, they cannot be holy as a person can.

Another reference that will help us is Exodus 13:2.

"Consecrate unto Me all the firstborn, whatever opens the womb among the children of Israel, both of man and beast; it is Mine."

The AV uses 'sanctify' where the NKJV uses 'consecrate', but it is the same Hebrew word, of course. It may surprise us, but there is no thought here of moral purity. All God was saying was that the firstborn offspring of the people and their animals were to be consecrated – sanctified – to Him. God later substituted the tribe of Levi for the firstborn of each family. The moral overtones come later in the rules for the priests and Levites, but the basic thought here is that of someone being set apart for a particular purpose.

Our next reference, Leviticus 10:3, brings in another aspect.

"And Moses said to Aaron, 'This is what the Lord spoke, saying:

By those who come near Me
I must be regarded as holy;
And before all the people
I must be glorified.' So Aaron held his peace."

This is interesting as well as significant. The AV puts the first sentence like this. "I will be sanctified in them that come nigh me". Two of Aaron's sons had come before God offering 'strange fire'. They acted presumptuously and were devoured by fire. And when Moses told his brother what the Lord had said, Aaron held his peace. The sin of those two young men was not some immorality or evil deed

like murder, but simply that they did not realise the importance of their roles and did not obey explicit instructions.

We are fortunate not to live in that Dispensation of Law when punishment was swift and often fatal. Nevertheless, we must not presume that we can be careless in our service for the Lord, for it always holds true that those who come near to God must regard Him as holy.

One other reference from the Old Testament that will help is Numbers 20:12.

"Then the Lord spoke to Moses and Aaron, "Because you did not believe Me, to hallow (sanctify) Me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land which I have given them." In what way did Moses not sanctify God before the people? Simply by 'losing his cool' and striking the rock instead of speaking to it as he had been instructed. He disobeyed.

The New Testament Word – Hagiadzo

The word first occurs in the New Testament in Matthew 6:9, "... Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name ...". Hallowed, of course, is hagiadzo.

Passing over many references because of available space, we come to 2 Timothy 2:19-21. These verses are helpful because we have the two sides of the matter shown in v. 19. "The Lord knows those who are His," and other Scripture shows us that whom the Lord knows, them He sanctifies. But then Paul has another quote. "Let everyone who names the name of Christ depart from iniquity." On His side, the Lord sanctifies His people, and on our side, we must depart from all iniquity.

In vv. 20 & 21, Paul uses an interesting analogy. He speaks about vessels in a great house, some of honour and some of dishonour. We would say utensils instead of vessels. But what does honour and dishonour refer to? The NIV's translation will guide us here.

"In a large house there are articles not only of gold and silver, but also of wood and clay; some are for noble purposes and some for ignoble. If a man cleanses himself from the latter, he will be an instrument for noble purposes, MADE HOLY, useful to the Master and prepared to do any good work."

Now that's a good standard by which to measure ourselves, don't you think?

The Means of Sanctification

We have already touched on how sanctification becomes ours, but let's be sure about it. I'm sure you will agree that our sanctification can only be through the death and resurrection of Christ our Lord. Several passages from Hebrews are relevant here.

“... ‘Behold, I have come to do Your will, O God.’ ... By that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.” 10:9, 10.

“For by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified.” 10:14. The word perfected means to be completed; to be brought to the goal, to the finish line.

“Therefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people with His own blood, suffered outside the gate. Therefore let us go forth to Him, outside the camp, bearing His reproach.”

Those verses don’t need any comment from me.

As we come to a conclusion, look at these verses from Ephesians and Colossians.

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who ... chose us in Him ... that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love ...” Eph. 1:3 & 4.

“Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave Himself for it, that He might sanctify it with the washing of water by the Word, that He might present it to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that it should be holy and without blemish.” Eph. 5:25 – 27.

“And you, who were once alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now

He has reconciled in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy and blameless and above reproach in His sight, if indeed you continue in the faith ...” Col. 1:21 – 23.

Conclusion

I want to conclude with a passage that I do not remember being taught in the denomination in which I was saved and grew up. One of its doctrines was that of entire sanctification, meaning that sanctification was a second blessing attained after salvation by a complete surrender of self. So it was something of a shock to me when I first read these verses from 1 Corinthians 1:26–31.

“For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble are called. But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are, (so) that no flesh should glory in His presence. But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God – and righteousness AND SANCTIFICATION and redemption – (so) that, as it is written, ‘He who glories let him glory in the Lord.’”

It was a wonderful relief to know that in the same way in which the Lord Jesus is my righteousness and redemption, He is also my sanctification. And on our side, may our lives always sanctify Him. **SB**

One Who Never Changes

By the late David Fryer.

Day by day we continue to walk along the Pilgrim Way, looking unto Him. How blest we are in Christ, that we have **someone** to look at ‘all along the way’. While we are in this body, we are subject to change, both physical and even our spiritual outlook can vary, so it is good to know that we are made complete in **One who never changes** - ‘Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, today and forever’ (Heb. 13:8). Yes, He is unchanged and unchangeable!

This same Jesus is the One portrayed in Genesis, in the creation both of nature and mankind. He is the promised Redeemer; the One who said, “Before Abraham was, I AM”; He is the shadow of good things to come in Old Testament types; and when we see Israel in disobedience, neglecting the ‘so great salvation’, He is the same One who holds out His pleading hands to them.

What love He still had for Israel, and He will keep His covenants and promises that He made with their ‘fathers’. It will happen that ‘the parched land shall become a pool, and the thirsty land springs of water; in the habitation of jackals, where each lay, there shall be grass with reeds and rushes’. In all these things, He never changes. Our Lord is ever faithful, and all these things in His plan and purposes shall come to pass.

He is the same Jesus of Bethlehem, of Nazareth, of Jerusalem, of Galilee, and also the One who mingled His tears with the widow at the gate of Nain. He wept over the memory of the cherished friendship of Lazarus, and was ‘melted’ in a flood of tenderest compassion as He beheld Jerusalem - that fated city and an apostate land, for He knew that soon for a time, God would put them aside. They would become LO-AMMI, ‘not my people’. Then His redemptive love would be known by a company of God’s people who were chosen in Him ‘before the foundation of the world’ (Eph. 1:4).

Yet, throughout all these changing circumstances, He is constant and remains the same. **SB**

Clean Every Whit

By Charles Welch.

“He needeth not save to wash his feet” (John 13:10).

The thirteenth chapter of John’s Gospel marks an important division. The first twelve chapters deal with the Lord’s public witness, with its reception on the part of the few, and its rejection on the part of the many. Chapter 1:11 says, “He came unto His own, and His own received Him not.” Chapter 13:1 says, “... Having loved His own which were in the world, He loved them unto the end.” These “His own” differ from those in 1:11, for these had received Him, whilst His closing words in chapter 12:48-50 are concerning those who had rejected Him.

The incident that occupies the opening verses of chapter 13 is well known to most of us, and we particularly wish to draw attention to two of the impetuous remarks of Peter and the Lord’s answer to them, for our own edification. The Lord, by girding Himself with a towel, took the lowest place of all, that of the menial slave. Truly “He came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many.”

It will be remembered that 22:24 records that at the supper “there was *also* a strife among them, which of them should be accounted the greatest”. Possibly that fact that upon taking their places for the Passover, some must necessarily have been found nearer, and some further, from the Lord’s person than others, may have caused this argument to have arisen. The Lord Jesus listened to their words, and in His marvellous love and condescension, gave them an impressive rebuke by His lowly action.

Think for a moment of the utter depths brought out by reading verses three and four together. Though -

“Jesus knew that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He was come from God (the Apostle), and went to God (and Great High Priest of our profession), yet He riseth from supper, and laid aside His garments, and took a towel, and girded Himself.”

“(He) Who, being in the form of God, thought it not a thing to be grasped at to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men; and being found in the fashion as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.” (Phil. 2:6-8).

It seems that no one had volunteered to do the lowly office of washing the feet, and so the Lord Himself stoops down and girds Himself; what a picture of His wonderful grace in our salvation.

Not a sound is heard from any until the Lord reaches Peter. He could not keep silent, “Lord, dost *Thou* wash *my* feet? ... Thou shalt never wash my feet.” The difference between the unworthy Peter and the gracious Lord was too much for him; he felt if others said nothing, he must. The Lord Jesus, pausing in His lowly work, looked at Peter and said, “If I wash thee not, thou hast no part (no portion) *with Me*.”

All Peter’s qualms fled before the prospect of not having a part with His beloved Master, and He more than undoes what he had previously said by exclaiming, “Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head”, rather than forfeit a share with Thee. This time he goes to the other extreme. The Lord answers him with the words, “He that hath been bathed (leloumenous) hath no necessity save to wash (nipsasthai) his feet, but is clean every whit.”

What lessons are here! Do we not see that only those who have been washed by the Lord have any share with Him? May every reader know the completeness of the cleansing *once* and *forever* that results from the application of the atoning blood of Christ. Peter’s words, “Not my feet only, but my hands and my head”, are echoed daily by many believers, who, seeing their own unworthiness, belittle the fulness that is theirs in Christ, and do not rest upon the gracious words that they are “accepted in the Beloved”, that they are “complete in Him”. To such the reply of the Lord may come with power, “He that hath been bathed is clean every whit.”

Two most important aspects of sanctification are to be found in verse 10:-

1. “He that hath been bathed is clean every whit.”
2. Nevertheless, such an one needs to “wash his feet”.

We are continually forgetting that these two go together. Not only are we in heavenly places in Christ, but we are also still in the body on the earth. Some, realizing that the Scriptures teach that the believer is “complete in Christ”, emphasize the first sentence, “they are clean every whit”. These either develop some phase of “sinless perfection”, or irresponsible license. They forget that there will be a continual need for those who are clean every whit to wash their feet.

Others, realizing that since their conversion their feet have strayed from the path of truth, forget their

A Chronology of Acts

By Athol Walter

A remarkable feature of the Old Testament is the chronological details given throughout. In the early chapters of Genesis particularly, not only do we have the age at which various men died, but also the age at which they had their first sons. This has prompted more than one Bible scholar to construct a calendar of events from creation to the crucifixion of the Lord. It is significant that the ages are given *only* for the descendants of Seth, and then after Noah, for the descendants of Shem. In other words, the line of descent to the Messiah has a time line, while the descendants of Cain, and then later, Japheth and Ham, do not. Of course, there is much discussion about open or closed genealogies throughout the Old Testament and consequently how accurate such constructed chronologies can be, but regardless of that, with the wealth of chronological detail given, it is possible to deduce reliable dates for many Old Testament characters and events.

Clean Every Whit. Cont. from previous page.

unaltered and unalterable perfectness in Christ, and so pray not only for the washing of their feet, but also their hands and head. They forget that the Lord has “forgiven us *all* trespasses”; that He has made us “new creatures in Christ Jesus”, and that our “walk” here below cannot alter our “position” in the heavenlies in Christ. The first class develop spiritual pride; the second spiritual despair.

Let us remember the *perfectness* of His cleansing, but also the *imperfectness* of our walk as believers. We shall then be able, like Paul, not only to say, “Oh wretched man that I am”, but also, “There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus”.

“If we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin. If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us. My little children, these things I write unto you, that ye sin not, and if any man sin, we have an Advocate (Paraclete) with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.” (1 John 1:7-2:1).

(The above article is taken from the Berean Expositor, Vol. 1, pp. 35-37) **SB**

There are also some remarkable prophecies dealing with future events which include specific time statements. Daniel’s prophecy of the Seventy Weeks determined on Israel and Jerusalem is a case in point. These prophecies are so accurate that liberal scholars and skeptics say they must have been written after the events they foretell.

It is a different story in the New Testament, however, where the time line becomes much less distinct, so much so, that it is quite difficult to allocate dates to the important events recorded. I would go so far as to say that it is difficult even to be aware of the passing of time in many passages. It also does not help that, in some early chapters of Acts, Luke occasionally goes back on his tracks to record something that was contemporaneous with events already mentioned!

In spite of those things, however, I believe it will greatly help a proper understanding of what was happening throughout Acts to be aware not only of passing time, but also the order in which the events took place. This will have a great bearing on how we interpret the message of the Book. In my experience, many Christians seem to be completely unaware of the time sequence in Acts, and what is worse, seem to think it is unimportant and irrelevant.

My purpose therefore, is to present a chronological framework of Acts with the information we have. Many dates will be tentative and I know that expositors disagree with each other, yet we can construct a helpful time frame because there are several events that we can fix with certainty.

Two Significant Events Not Mentioned

In Galatians 2, Paul writes of a visit he made to Jerusalem where he met with James, Cephas (Peter) and John. This James, however, is the brother of the Lord, not the brother of John who was one of the twelve Disciples. That James had been killed by King Herod in Acts 12:2. The James that Paul met had become a believer following the Lord’s resurrection and then became a leader in the assembly of believers in Jerusalem. Now, what is outside the view of Acts is that this second James was also killed, in AD 62. That was just about the time that Paul arrived in Rome as a prisoner. Whether Luke and Paul knew about the death of James we can’t say, but as far as the purpose of the Acts record at that late stage was concerned, what happened in Jerusalem was no longer

relevant. The focus of Acts in the closing chapters is on the witness to Jesus as Israel's Messiah to the Jews of the Dispersion, and their reaction to that witness. The fact, however, that the death of James is not mentioned is a small point in favour of Acts having been written early in the sixties.

The second significant event which, understandably, is not recorded in Acts, is the destruction of the Temple and much of Jerusalem by the Romans in AD 70. Luke had finished his account with Paul's conference with the Jewish leaders in Rome and their refusal to accept his witness. That conference closed with Paul quoting Isaiah 6:9 & 10 for the last time in the New Testament, which, in effect, was the divorcing of Israel until the time comes for God to resume His work in and for His chosen nation.

Most expositors agree that Paul and Luke arrived in Rome about AD 61, and the 'two whole years', mentioned by Luke in the last two verses of the book, would take us up to AD 63/4. We cannot be absolutely certain of these particular dates, but they are close enough for our purposes. It is likely that Paul was executed by Nero in AD 68, at which time, Jerusalem was under siege by a Roman army and drawing closer to its terrible day of punishment.

Starting And Closing Dates

So we have a closing date for Acts – AD 64. The start of Acts is quite easy also, because the opening of Acts flows seamlessly on from the Gospel accounts. The overlap of the closing chapter of Luke with the opening verses of Acts is quite instructive, to say the least.

Christians sometimes speak about Acts two as the 'first Pentecost' but this is quite wrong. Pentecost is a Jewish Feast, and it occurred on the day after the end of seven weeks from the Passover. The arithmetic is not hard. Seven weeks is 49 days. Add one day and we are at the fiftieth day since Passover, and that is exactly what the Greek word Pentecostos means – fiftieth.

By the way, this is why the assembled crowd of disciples in Acts 2 had to wait. I was taught as a young believer that they were waiting until they all got into an appropriate 'holy' spirit and attitude, and that when they all became of one heart and one mind, then the Holy Spirit fell on them. It was then said by my teachers that if we could all get into that same right spirit, we could have 'another Pentecost'. Sorry. Wrong exegesis. The assembled disciples simply had to wait for the right day to arrive, just as we say to our children, "No, you can't have your Christmas presents now. You have to wait for Christmas morning." The coming of 'power from on high' was the fulfillment of the truth that the Feast of

Pentecost prefigured, which was the beginning of the harvest of Israel. Now, back to our subject.

If we note the chronology of the closing events of the Gospel period, we have this. The Lord was crucified at Passover time, (I'm not concerned here as to whether it was on the 14th or 15th of Nisan) and 50 days later the assembled company was filled with the power of the Holy Spirit. So if we know the year of the crucifixion, we know the year in which Acts started. Simple! Well, not quite.

There is considerable divergence of opinion as to the year of the crucifixion, suggested dates going from AD 29 to AD 33. There are probably some even outside those limits. I personally prefer AD 30 for a reason that may not seem very important to many. If we allow that Acts tells of the second offer of Jesus of Nazareth to Israel as her Messiah – a point which is an important plank in the BBFA's platform – then it seems to me logical that the period of trial be forty years. I say trial because Israel were getting a second chance to accept their Messiah, so it was something of a test. There is Scriptural precedence for that, for example, the forty years wanderings in the wilderness after the Exodus. So, we know that the axe fell on Israel in AD 70, which was the de facto judgement on the nation, and 70 – 40 = AD 30. If you are unconvinced by that, so be it, but I will still use AD 30 as the starting point for Acts.

A Certain Date

We do, however, have an event in Acts for which we have an exact year. In Acts 12 we read of King Herod's murder of James and imprisonment of Peter. This is Herod Agrippa I, a grandson of Herod the Great. Then from v. 20 on, we read of Herod's awful death after having given a public speech. We can name the year in which this event took place.

The Emperor Claudias returned to Rome from a trip to Britain in January AD 44. Josephus makes an almost casual reference to the fact that Herod died during a festival held to honour Claudias on his safe return. This, together with several other factors concerning details of Herod's reign, give us AD 44 for his death. This means that Acts 1 to 12 covers 14 years. Notice that the last few verses of Acts 13 tell us that a famine had been predicted, and consequently, the church in Antioch sent funds by Barnabus and Paul, to the church in Jerusalem to help them during the famine. (Yes, I know he is called Saul at this stage, but I'll stick with Paul so I don't get confused.) Then Acts 14:1 says that it was about that time that Herod killed James etc. So Barnabus and Paul travelled to Jerusalem about the time of the death of Herod.

Acts 13:26 says that after Barnabus had brought Paul to Antioch, they ministered there for a whole year. We have the account of Paul's dramatic conversion in

Acts 9. There are no definite times stated here, only a couple of references to 'days' spent in Damascus. Paul is then taken to Jerusalem, where he spends some unspecified time witnessing to Greek-speaking Jews. When the Jews plotted to kill him – shades of Stephen's fate here – Paul was taken to Caesarea and from there went back to Tarsus.

Paul himself gives some details of this period of his life in Galatians 1 and in v. 18 says that he did not go to Jerusalem until after three years. It is beyond our purpose and space available in this study to try to establish an exact sequence of Paul's movements. My main concern is the passage of time in relation to the more important events. What we know is that before the visit of Barnabus and Paul to Jerusalem in AD 43/4, that, following Paul's conversion, there was a period of three years plus one year, and other periods of 'days'. Shall we allow, say, five years then, between Paul's conversion and the Jerusalem trip with Barnabus? That would put Paul's conversion around AD 38/9. In Appendix 180 in the Companion Bible, which deals with the chronology of Acts, Dr. Bullinger puts Paul's conversion in AD 37, so we are in the same ballpark, so to speak. If you have a Companion Bible, I recommend a close study of App. 180.

If we use Bullinger's date of AD 37 for Paul's conversion, we find ourselves at a point 7 years from the beginning of Acts. Returning to Acts 9, we see that, after Paul left Jerusalem, the narrative returns to Peter in v. 32 with the words "Now it came to pass, as Peter went through all parts of the country ...". This is hardly a definite statement about time, and it is therefore difficult to say whether Peter's visit to Cornelius was before or after Paul's conversion. This is one place where Luke may be going back in time to pick up another story. What is certain, however, is that the Holy Spirit has recorded Paul's conversion before we read of Peter going to Cornelius. I think the message for us all is that Paul, destined to be the Apostle to the Gentiles, was converted before Peter was sent to open the door of the Kingdom of God to the first Gentile convert. Because of this, I think that the two events occurred in that order also.

What this means is that the first Gentile converts were not brought into the company of believers in Judea until at least seven years after Pentecost in Acts 2. Up to that point, the 'church' was composed entirely of Jews.

Sailing to Rome

Another event that can be dated with a fair degree of certainty is Paul's embarkation for Rome at Caesarea, and consequently, when he arrived in Rome. Information is given by secular historians of the time concerning the various governors of Judea, such as Felix, Festus and King Agrippa. The consensus of the scholars' opinions is that Paul's ship left Caesarea in either AD 59 or 60.

Then there is another detail that will help us. Acts 28:16 tells us that, on arriving in Rome, Paul was handed over to the Captain of the Guard. The proper term is not 'Captain' but 'Prefect', and it is a singular word. In AD 62, however, two Prefects were appointed. Prior to this, one man, named Burrhus, held the position of 'Captain of the Guard' until his death which was in February AD 62. It was Burrhus who received the prisoner from Judea. So

Paul got to Rome in AD 61, or very early in 62. This in turn means that he was set free two years later in AD 63 or early 64, and would have left Rome before the anti-Christian persecutions under Nero in the mid-sixties broke out.

We are now in a position to construct a chronology of Acts around these dates that are reasonably accurate, and this will help us to see not only the passage of time, but also the progression of the witness of God to Israel during that passage of time.

I have consulted the works of Conybeare and Howson (Life and Epistles of St. Paul); E. W. Bullinger (The Companion Bible, App. 180) and Charles Welch (The Apostle of the Reconciliation). I will refer to these writers in the following list by these initials:- Conybeare and Howson, CH; E. W. Bullinger, EWB; Charles Welch, CW. I have consulted other authors, but their dates generally agree with the earlier mentioned writers. Welch refrains from giving dates for the epistles, but has definite views on their order.

One of the points I will emphasise later in this study is that the epistles written during the years of Acts will naturally reflect the same doctrinal point of view of the Acts period, and therefore, it is important for us to know which those epistles are. This point applies particularly to Paul's epistles, for the other New Testament writers are all witnesses to the Circumcision. The chronology shows clearly which epistles were written during Acts, and which came after. It is interesting to note that whatever disagreements there are among expositors as to the dating and order of Paul's earlier epistles, there is complete unanimity as to which epistles were written after Acts.

If we use Dr. Bullinger's date of AD 37 for Paul's conversion, we find ourselves at a point 7 years from the beginning of Acts.

A Chronology Of The Acts Of The Apostles.

AD	Events Recorded in Scripture	Comments
30	Crucifixion, Resurrection & Ascension Pentecost 50 days after Passover	Tiberias Roman Emperor. (EWB puts the Crucifixion in AD 29 on April 3, the Resurrection on April 7 th , Ascension on May 13 and Pentecost on May 23.) The Apostles' ministry commences at Pentecost with many Jews accepting their witness. The healing of the lame man in Acts 4 occurred quite soon after the Day of Pentecost, so Peter and John, when they were taken before the Sanhedrin, were standing before the very same group that had sent the Lord to His death only a matter of months before.
35	Martyrdom of Stephen.	EWB. He gives no evidence for this date.
37	Paul's conversion.	This date is arrived at by working back from the death of Herod Agrippa I (Acts 12). Caligula now Emperor
39	Peter visits Cornelius Gentiles were brought in at this time only as wild olive branches grafted into the cultivated olive tree, i.e. Israel, to stir the nation to bear fruit, even if only through jealousy. (Rom. 11:11-26).	Up to this point, the witness had been to Jews only .

		Gentile believers were in a subordinate position to Jewish believers up to the end of Acts.
40	Paul's 1st. visit to Jerusalem 'to see Peter'. Then goes back to Tarsus.	
41		Claudius becomes Emperor
44	Barnabus sent to Antioch. Brings Paul from Tarsus.	
45	Paul's 2nd. visit to Jerusalem with Barnabus.	
45	Paul and Barnabus go on first missionary journey	
51	Paul's 3rd. visit to Jerusalem	
51	Paul's 2 nd missionary journey.	During this time, Paul writes Galatians & Hebrews(CW); 1 Thessalonians; 2 Thessalonians; Hebrews (EWB).
54	Paul's 4 th . visit to Jerusalem	
55	Paul's 3 rd . missionary journey	
57/8		Paul writes I & II Corinthians; Galatians (EWB & CH); Romans
58	Paul's 5 th . visit to Jerusalem. Arrest. 2 years in prison at Caesarea.	
60	Sets sail for Rome. Shipwreck on Malta.	
61	Arrives in Rome. Allowed to live in own hired house. Meets Jewish leaders. Dismisses Israel. Second Offer of Kingdom to Israel ends.	

Dispensation of the Mystery revealed through Paul

61-63 Paul writes Ephesians, Colossians, Philippians and Philemon.
All distinctions between believers now gone. Gentile Christians today are not wild olive branches grafted into Israel's olive tree. The Body of Christ is not the Bride. It is called the new man (Eph. 2:15), and a man cannot be a bride.

63/4 (?) Paul acquitted and released. Travels around churches. Writes I Timothy and Titus. Later imprisoned in Rome. Writes II Timothy. Executed by Nero, who is himself dead a month or so later. The Jewish revolt against Rome started in AD 66. Vespasian was the first Roman General, but he became emperor when Nero died in June AD 68. His son, Titus, replaced him as leader of the army. The Romans finally broke into Jerusalem in AD 70, when the Temple was completely destroyed.

Comments on the Chronology

We can see clearly from the chronology how the extraordinary witness to Israel developed. It started in Jerusalem, as the Lord had instructed, and gradually moved out into wider circles, but right to the last chapter of Acts, the witness always went to Israel **first**. The first section of Acts details the witness to Israel in the homeland. This reached its climax with the death of Stephen, where the rulers of Israel once more refused Jesus as their Messiah'.

Saul is introduced into the record at this point, first as the enemy of the Way, but then as an ardent advocate of Messiah Jesus. Peter is sent to Cornelius and opens the door of the Kingdom to Gentiles. Gentiles start to be saved, which causes Jewish believers some problems. Paul, with various helpers, goes on a number of journeys, preaching to Jews of the Dispersion. He always goes to the synagogue first, and only turns to Gentiles after the Jews oppose the witness. But, in the next town, it is back to the synagogue once again.

Finally, Paul gets to Rome, but in chains as a 'guest' of Nero. His first official act is to gather the Jewish leaders there to his house, and for the whole day, witnesses to them concerning Jesus from the Law and the Prophets. Some believed, but many did not.

We must be careful not to apply our evangelical standards to those times. If anything like 30% – I'm just pulling a figure out of the air – of any crowd we were preaching to, responded and believed, we would think we had a great success. But during the Acts period, the witness and appeal was to the Jewish nation, not just individuals, and nothing less than a national acceptance would suffice.

Everywhere Paul and his colleagues went the results had been the same. Some believed, but the majority rejected Jesus of Nazareth. So, in Rome, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Paul pronounced the nation guilty as charged by quoting Isa. 6:9 & 10. Then came the fateful words of Acts 28:28, "Therefore let it be known to you that the salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles and they will hear it."

Here in Acts 28:25-29, we have the sentence pronounced by the Judge on Israel. But then we have the sentence carried out in AD 70, when the Roman army under Titus, breached the walls of Jerusalem and wreaked havoc and destruction. As the Lord had predicted in Matt. 24, there was not one stone of the Temple left standing on another. Since that time, the Jews have had no Temple. In the lifetime of many of us, Israel has become a state again. But they still have no Temple, and the

times of the Gentiles roll on. Momentous events are not far away, but remember what the Lord said in Matt. 24:3-8. He predicted false messiahs, wars and rumours of wars, nation rising against nation, and famines, pestilences and earthquakes. But these things, He said, do not signal the end. They are only signs of the beginning of the trouble to come.

Why Was The Punishment Not Imposed Immediately After The Cross?

There is another progression from the Gospels through Acts that I would like you to ponder. Luke 19 has the account of the Lord's triumphant entry into Jerusalem, an event which clearly showed Him to be Israel's King. But notice vv. 41 to 44. The Lord wept over Jerusalem as He gazed down upon the city. Then He said, 'If you had known, especially in this day, the things that make for your peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes.' The next verses predict the terrible events of the Roman siege to come.

Next, in Matt. 23:37 & 38 the Lord laments over Jerusalem, saying that He often wanted to gather its people unto Himself, but they were not willing. Then He continues, "See! Your house (i.e. the Temple) is left to you desolate." I believe that the events predicted in these two passages would have happened very soon after the crucifixion, except for one thing. Turn to Luke 23:34. As He was being placed on the Cross, the Lord prayed:

"Father, forgive them for they do not know what they do."

Luke is the only Gospel that records this prayer, and some expositors say it should not be there. But we have a definite confirmation of it in Acts 3. After they had healed the lame man at the gate of the Temple, Peter and John addressed the crowd that gathered around them. Peter does not mince his words, but accuses them directly of the murder of Jesus the Christ. And in v. 17 he says this, "Yet now, brethren, I know that you did it in ignorance, as did also your rulers." To my mind, this confirms that the Lord did indeed pray for Israel to be forgiven for His rejection, **and the events recorded in Acts is God's answer to that prayer.**

In other words, the threatened devastation of Jerusalem is postponed while the second offer of Jesus as Israel's Messiah is made, both to the Jews of the homeland and the Jews who lived outside Palestine. When the crisis point is reached in Rome, and the Jewish leaders there also rejected their Messiah, the sentence was pronounced. This time there was no prayer for forgiveness.

When this progression is understood, it becomes clear why Acts ends rather abruptly. The instructions of the Lord in Acts 1:8 had been fulfilled. Israel had

graciously been given her second chance, but had not responded. So there was nothing more to be said. Hebrews 2:1-4 had warned them if they didn't respond positively to this second offer, there would be no escape and no more chances.

What Happened Next?

As shown in the chronology above, Paul wrote the epistles of Ephesians, Colossians and Philippians during the two years which followed his day conference with the Jewish leaders in Rome. It is in these epistles that the new revelation concerning the Mystery and the Church which is Christ's Body is first revealed. Consider the implications of the chronology. If Paul wrote Ephesians etc. after the end of Acts, and claims then that this was a new revelation that had never been given before, we certainly won't find it in the epistles written during Acts.

So why have most Christians missed the fact that Ephesians and Colossians tells of something new? Simply because they have been blinded by tradition. Now it is a worthy saying, which should be considered by us all, that there is nothing wrong with tradition, provided we do not confuse it with truth! But how did it come about that tradition led the Church at large astray? History gives us the answer.

The Judaizers

In Acts 10, the Lord had to go to extraordinary lengths to get Peter to visit Cornelius. One of the first things Peter said to Cornelius when he arrived, was that it was unlawful for a Jew to fraternise with someone of another nation. It is not Peter, however, that I want you to consider. Rather it is those who travelled with him. Notice their reaction when Holy Spirit power fell on these uncircumcised Gentiles, as it had done on Jewish disciples of the Lord back in Acts 2. Ch. 10:45 says, "And those of the circumcision (Jews, in other words) who believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles also."

It is worth noting here that if the tradition that the 'church' started in Acts 2 is true and that there were Gentiles converted then, there would have been no reason at all for Peter to need a special vision to go to a Gentile, nor for Peter's companions to have been astonished that God was bringing Gentiles into the fold of believers. Their reaction proves that this tradition is not the truth.

We must also note the reaction of the assembly when Peter returned to Jerusalem. In modern parlance, Peter was 'carpeted' and asked to justify his visit to Gentiles. Again, this is an unbelievable reaction if there were Gentile converts already in the Jerusalem assembly. We will pass over what happened with Peter back in Jerusalem – although I hope you will read the account carefully – and turn to

Galatians. In the opening chapters, Paul is defending his status as an independent apostle. In ch. 2:4 he mentions 'false brethren' who had come in to the fellowship secretly to see what was being taught to Gentile believers.

Then in vv. 11-21, Paul tells of what happened in Antioch when Peter was there with them. V. 12 mentions certain men who came from James, whose presence caused Peter to stop eating with the Gentile converts. Obviously, these men intimidated Peter.

It appears that these 'Judaizers', as they are called, spent considerable time visiting places where Paul had established churches, trying to subvert Gentile converts into believing they must be circumcised and observe the Mosaic law. In 2 Cor. 11:16-33, Paul lists many things he had suffered for the sake of the Gospel, and in v. 26 we have 'in danger from false brethren'. This is the term he used in Gal. 2:4 of those who were subverting his converts. They are also mentioned in Titus 1:10 & 11.

Then, in 2 Timothy, his last epistle, Paul states that 'all those in Asia have turned away from me'. This could mean only that Paul had been forgotten by most of the converts he had made in the Roman province of Asia without any doctrinal overtones. On the other hand, it could mean that not only had he been shunned in the end by the churches he had established, but believers as a group had also turned away from the new revelation that had been entrusted to him.

Paul is the only New Testament writer who has anything to say about what God would do if Israel failed. He alone reveals the secret (mystery) that God had a place for believers, including Gentiles, that had no relation to Abraham or Moses. But all in Asia turned away from Paul. So when the Roman army smashed the Temple in Jerusalem to the ground and ended Jewish national life, Christians in the surrounding world had no idea what God would do to fill the gap caused by Israel's sudden departure.

I think that, to a large extent, the Judaizers won the battle. Instead of going on with Paul into the freedom of the truth of the Mystery and the Church, the Body of Christ, most believers turned back into a Judaistic form of Christianity. And the doctrine arose that the church had taken over Israel's place, prophecies and blessings.

There is more to be said, but we will leave it to be continued in our next issue. In the meantime, I hope that you will consider the implications of both the order and the timing of the major events in Acts. Not enough attention is given to these things by many believers. **SB**

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