

MSB 228

MORE Seed and Bread

BRIEF BIBLICAL MESSAGES FROM

THE WORD OF TRUIH MINISTRY

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THE SALVATION-BRINGING GOSPEL OF CHRIST

by M. B. Hammond

The diligent student of the Bible knows that during the Acts Period everyone who became a believer in Christ was responding to a divinely given message presented by the apostles or the brethren saints, that is, only persons authorized by God. There was no written message, for the apostles were commissioned by God to verbally spread the message of the Gospel and they were given the power to back this up, confirming it by signs and wonders. Their divine commission was always credentialed as to its truth, whether the signs preceded or followed the message. Further, they had the power to commission others to perform the signs and give the Gospel message. Thus every believer during the Acts Period must be classified as one who had seen and believed. The opposite of this is true for the believer today; we have not seen, yet we have believed. We have the record of Scripture which says, Jesus saith to Thomas, because thou hast seen Me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen and yet have believed (John 20:29). Thus we know something has changed, and God is dealing with us in a different, even unique, way. We need to understand God's ways, but we must go to the Scriptures to find His instructions, to know what He is doing.

The ministry of Paul, his apostleship, came to an end at Acts 28:28 by his own pronouncement. He was given special commissions to write the last seven of his epistles after this time (and perhaps other things too), but we know that the manifest power of the Holy Spirit to do signs and wonders was no longer with him.

He had "to leave Trophimus at Miletum sick" (2 Timothy 4:20); also Epaphroditus, Paul's loyal helper, had been sick, "indeed he was sick nigh unto death; but God had mercy on him" (Philippians 2:27). This is in contrast to Paul's record of miraculous healing (Acts 28:3-9).

Clearly, there was a change of administration, and Paul reveals this as the "dispensation of the grace of God" (Ephesians 3:2). This "secret revelation" had been made known to him (Eph. 3:3) so he could present it to others. His words, that mark the dispensational change, were, Be it known therefore unto you, that the salvation (Gk.-soterion) of God is sent (Gk.-apostello) unto the Gentiles (Gk.-ethnos, nations), and that they will hear it (Gk.-a usanti). To understand this passage the Greek words, have been examined: the word soterion is not the normal noun for "salvation," but rather a verb used as an adjective, and is expressed by the term "the salvation-bringing." Obviously, this is incomplete in that an adjective cannot stand alone, and thus the subject must be understood to be the message and/or the power of the Gospel. The word apostello is a verb which means "commissioned" or "authorized." The word akosanti means "it will get through to them." Thus a revised version would say, Let it be known to you, that the salvation-bringing gospel of God has been authorized to the nations, and it will get through to them (Acts 28:28, Translator's Revised Version).

This new dispensation of grace was an unexpected event that had not been predicted by the prophets of Israel and came as a complete surprise to the believers. Paul explained this to the Philippian believers saying, Being confident of this very thing that He which hath begun a good work in you, will perfect it (Gk.-epiteleo, to bring it to a full end) until the day of Jesus Christ (Phil. 1:6). In verse 10 he went on to say, that ye may distinguish the things that carry through; that ye may be sincere and without offense until the day of Christ. The "Day of Christ" is another name for the "Kingdom" which we, too, are awaiting. These believers, whom Paul had personally led to Christ (see Acts 16), now faced the loss of the manifest blessings of the Holy Spirit, but the Gospel of Christ still was their redemption. However, now it didn't need a person specifically commissioned to deliver it, because the message itself was now commissioned to all nations. The message could be spoken by anyone, but there would be no signs before it or following it, nor would that person have a personal commission or visible accreditation.

This gospel, this "salvation-bringing message," had not before been written, because in the Acts Period there always were men who spoke it with the divine inspiration of the Holy Spirit and confirmed it by the signs. This meant that God had planned a new and different method for sending forth His message of salvation. Paul's epistles to the Thessalonians, Corinthians, Galatians, Romans and Hebrews were all written before Acts 28:28 and they contain sketchy references to the Gospel, but mostly by way of review to people who already had the direct message from him, or his ministers. At that time the salvation-bringing message had not yet been written, and while the Jews had always had this message, the other nations were generally excluded (excepting the house of Cornelius in Acts 10), until Paul was commissioned to go to them (starting at Acts 13). These people were always in a subservient position in that Paul was constrained to go to the Jew first, even among the nations. But, Acts 28:28 changed all that and now the message carried the whole guarantee of salvation; God always keeps His promises. Paul had special commissions to write his seven last epistles: Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Timothy, Titus and Philemon. They tell about this dispensation of grace, but what is this salvation-bringing message and where do we find it?

In the city of Jerusalem, where the apostles were dwelling, there was a man named John who had been a disciple of John the Baptist, and was prominent among the twelve apostles of Jesus Christ. His ministry in the Acts Period, in connection with proclaiming Jesus as the Christ (Messiah), had to do with the Jews in the land, the people of the circumcision, as Galatians 2:9 indicates. That the apostle's mission had been faithfully discharged was confirmed by Paul: But I say, Have they (the Jews) not heard? Yea, verily, their sound went into all the earth, and their words unto the end of the world (Rom. 10:18). We now see that John, at Acts 28:28, was given a new commission, and a new assignment. It was to be his task to put into written form this salvation-bringing message of God, the same one that Paul announced had been authorized to the nations. This message is concerned with Jesus Christ throughout, presenting His deity more thoroughly than any of the Gospels. We find it today in the fourth gospel, commonly called the Gospel of John, which God inspired, through John the Apostle. This book stands out from the three preceding "synoptic gospels" because in it the writer declares both his commission and his purpose: There came a man, sent (commissioned) from God, whose name was John. He came for a witness, that he might bear witness of the Light, that all (people) might

believe through it (the witness). He was not the light, but came that he might bear witness of the Light (John 1:6-8, NAS).

Many authors have confused John the Apostle, in this passage, with John the Baptist, mentioned later in the first chapter. John, the author of this book, was given a divine commission to write this witness, and this passage presents his credentials. This witness is a written record by which all men, Jews and Gentiles alike, can find belief in Jesus Christ. John had often spoken his personal witness to the Jews in the Acts Period, and it was well received, but now it was to be written; a witness to be without priority or distinction of any kind. The clear statement of the purpose of this book is given near the end of it where he says, Many other signs therefore Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these have been written that you (the reader) may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and believing you may have life through His name (John 20:30-31, NAS). This statement cannot refer to any other book in the Bible. It is the only book exclusively written that men might believe, and if a man is to qualify as a believer in Jesus Christ, then he must come face to face with the facts given in this record, as provided by God through John.

When the last word of John's Gospel was written, it passed out of his hands and control. From that moment on it was copied and sent to believers everywhere. Now there was available a book, inspired by God, which was capable of producing believers in the magnificent truth about Jesus Christ, and upon believing they were guaranteed eternal life through His name.

There is no other book in Scripture that can be designated as "the word of life" and it is the only book that is credentialed as the "salvation-bringing message" of God, which was now authorized to the nations. God's Word never returns to Him void; it always accomplishes its purpose.

After 62 AD (Acts 28:28), all over the world, a new company of believers sprang up, not as the fruit of any apostolic ministry, and not by signs and miracles. They were produced by God's written Word, conveyed by other men who had no credentials, but were generated by the Spirit of God in His secret way. This divine generation of men goes on continually and some men respond positively, by following Paul's instruction to Timothy, Study (be diligent) to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing (handling accurately) the word of

truth (2 Tim. 2:15). The thing we must be most concerned with is that we continue walking in the Truth. Truth is that which is in accord with the facts of Scripture, and if we continue studying and working to understand the Scriptures, the Holy Spirit energizes our discoveries of its truth and wisdom.

We cannot even be boastful about placing our faith in Christ, as Scripture states, For by grace are you saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works lest any man should boast (Eph. 2:8-9).

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