

them (Col. 1:4); it is apparent that Epaphras had done the work of evangelizing this group (Col. 1:7-9). Paul then gave them a beautiful account of the preeminent position of Christ (Col. 1:13-22). This group appeared on the scene after Acts 28:28. While the Acts-Period believers were dying off, new groups of individuals, like the Colossians, were being formed. Now, the believers are addressed not as “out-called ones,” but as “saints” because they were separated from other men by being *individual believers* in the Lord Jesus Christ. There was no longer a “church”; it had ceased completely. There were small assemblies of saints all over the empire, but they no longer had the credentials of the Acts Period, and Christ was not commissioning men to be his apostles and teachers any longer. Men today who have titles like “bishop,” “reverend,” “priest,” and “pastor” are not sanctioned by Christ but rather ordained by other men claiming to have the power of Christ to commission them. Upon close scrutiny Scripture negates any such claim.

Ephesians was a general letter sent to all the known groups of saints of that day. The salutation should read: **Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God to the saints** (“who are at Ephesus” deleted by most textual critics), **the ones being in and believing in Christ Jesus. Grace be to you and peace from God our Father even the Lord Jesus Christ** (Eph. 1:1-2). A “saint” is not some religious icon but one who holds a personal, abiding belief in Jesus Christ. The written Word for mankind’s salvation was now the God-authorized Gospel. The Gospel of John declared this, **And many other signs did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book, but these are written that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through His name** (John 20:30-31). Eventually, the entire Holy Scriptures were collected, published and became available for all men to study.

What happened to the “church” of the Acts Period? As shown by the preceding verses, there was a period change in God’s plans for mankind and there is NO God-authorized “church” today. The sum total of saints is now made up of multitudes of independent believers in Jesus Christ—Christian individualists—who find their faith and the grace of God in the Holy Scriptures.

MORE
SEED & BREAD
FOR THE SOWER & FOR THE EATER
Isaiah 55:10

BRIEF BIBLICAL MESSAGES FROM
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WHAT BECAME OF THE “CHURCH” OF THE ACTS PERIOD?

By M.B. Hammond

The “church” of the Acts Period (33-years duration, after Jesus Christ ascended to Heaven) was drastically different from any so-called “church” of today. It had no buildings and owned no property. It contained neither membership rosters nor did it collect “tithes.” Everyone sold what they had and the money was distributed evenly to all. Its members and leaders were all chosen by God and had the evident powers of the Holy Spirit; they were all mediators to mankind at that time.

Let us define our terms. The word “church” in the *King James Version* (KJV) is taken from the Greek term *ekklesia*, which means in most Biblical occurrences “out-called ones” designated for service to God (*Young’s Analytical Concordance*).

A most significant change took place after Acts 28:28 was declared, when all the visible gifts, such as speaking in different languages, performing miracles and healings, and prophesying, disappeared. God was no longer working openly. The simplest answer to the question “What became of the ‘church’ of the Acts Period?” is that the “church” no longer exists as an earthly body. The individual “saints” were able to meet in small assemblies, but to call that “a church” is false since they were without the miraculous powers and the identifying qualifications present during the Acts Period.

The abrupt change is explained when Paul declared, **If ye have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which is given me to you-ward: how that by revelation He made known unto me the mystery (secret); (as I wrote afore in few words, whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery [secret] of Christ) which in other eons was not made known to the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto His holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit; that the Gentiles (nations) should be fellowheirs, and of the same body, and (joint) partakers of His promise in Christ by the gospel; . . . And to make all men see what is the fellowship of the**

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mystery (secret), which from the beginning of the world hath been hidden) in God who created all things by Jesus Christ: to the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places (among the mighty ones) might be known through the church (out-called One, meaning Christ, Gk.-*ekklesia*, [singular] NOT assembly) the manifold wisdom of God (Eph. 3:2-10). The Dispensation of the Grace of God is the time period in which we are living today. It is a time in which God is working in secret. His grace, love and favor, is being given freely to all mankind everywhere. He is neither punishing evil people nor rewarding good people openly. And the only way to know God is through the studying of His word, the Bible.

The epistles (Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 & 2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon) written after Acts 28:28, give us the facts regarding this period change. The Philippian epistle was written to a group of believers Paul had formed over ten years earlier. He addressed this letter “to the saints in Christ Jesus with the bishops and the deacons (the overwatchers and the servants).” This was a drastic change from the Acts Period epistles which were addressed to the “churches” (out-called ones), because they possessed the manifest gifts of the Holy Spirit. (See the epistles of 1 & 2 Thessalonians, 1 & 2 Corinthians, and Galatians where the word “church” appears in the salutation of each.) Paul said to them, **Always in every prayer of mine for you all making request with joy, for your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now; being confident of this very thing, that He which hath begun a good work in you will perform it (bring it to a full end, Gk.-*epiteleo*) until the day of Jesus Christ (Phil. 1:4-6) . . . And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment; that ye may approve things that are excellent (distinguish the things that carry through, Gk.-*diaphero*); that ye may be sincere and without offense (have no stumbling block) till the Day of Christ (Phil. 1:9-10).**

The Acts Period work had been brought to a full end. And because of this, there is NO God-authorized “church” body today. The Day of Christ is yet to come and is next in God’s plan, which is the premillennial Kingdom of God. When the Acts Period was over, the manifest gifts of the Holy Spirit also disappeared, and God now started working in secret. His manifest gifts no longer identified the believer, but Paul explains: **Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are His. And, let everyone that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity (2 Tim. 2:19).**

Paul had his healing powers from the Holy Spirit until the very end of the Acts Period, as Acts 28:4-9 indicates. Bitten by a viper he did not die, and he healed the father of a prominent man; he also healed many others on the island of Melita. When the dispensational change took place there was a great strain upon all the believers. They lost their credentials, and now only Jesus Christ really knew who were His children. Paul lost his power of healing. He says to the Philippians: **Yet I supposed it necessary to send you Epaphroditus, my brother, and companion in labor, and fellow soldier, but your mes-**

senger, and he that ministered to my wants. For he longed after you all, and was full of heaviness, because that ye had heard that he had been sick. For indeed he was sick nigh unto death: but God had mercy (grace) on him; and not on him only, but on me also, lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow (Phil. 2:25-27). In 2 Timothy 4:20, on returning to Rome as a prisoner, Paul says, **Erastus abode at Corinth but Trophimus I have left at Miletum sick.** It must have been hard for Paul to leave him, but he had no choice since he could no longer heal. In 1 Timothy 5:23 Paul advises Timothy, **Drink no longer water, but use a little wine for thy stomach’s sake and thine often infirmities.** The water supply systems of that day were often polluted, and the saints no longer had the healing protection so evident in the Acts Period (see Mark 16:15-17).

Paul gave many instructions to the saints, but most poignant is his comment in his final letter, **For the which cause I also suffer these things: nevertheless I am not ashamed: for I know whom I have believed (referring to Jesus Christ), and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day (2 Tim. 1:12).** Paul knew that his death was near. He could not look after the saints anymore, but instead committed this all to Christ, resting assured the faith would continue. We have no details recorded on Paul’s death—neither in Scripture nor in secular writings. It is probable that in 64 AD he was released for lack of charges against him, and most likely visited many of the assemblies of believers that he had established. Later Paul was taken prisoner again, this time as a common criminal under Roman law (2 Tim. 2:9). The Roman emperor, Nero, had started a grand scale persecution of Christians and Jews as a scapegoat for his act of burning a large portion of Rome, and Paul’s seizure was most likely in the wake of it. And so Paul says, **For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought the good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness . . . (2 Tim. 4:6-8).**

After Acts 28:28 several things happened. The believers of the Acts Period lost all of the manifest powers of the Holy Spirit, and many of them even defected from the truth. It has already been shown that the Philippian believers had been made aware of the change, and Paul sought to strengthen them. He said, **If there is any encouragement in Christ, if there is any consolation of love, if there is any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and compassion, make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose (Col. 2:1-2). Having this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God robbery, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond servant, and being made in the likeness of men, and being found in appearance as a man, humbled Himself by becoming obedient unto death, even the death on a cross (Phil. 2:5-8).** It was important for these believers to adapt to this change and become humble before God.

The letter to the Colossian believers is different. Paul had never met