

## Mid-Acts Criticisms

## Acts 2

There are many who dish out criticism to those of us who believe the church began in the middle of the book of Acts. Some of the most vocal and most disparaging remarks come from our Covenant (Reformed) brothers who believe the church began in the garden of Eden. They often direct their disdain, not only for the mid-Acts position, but also for any dispensationalist, sometimes even calling us heretics.

However, even in the dispensationalist camp there is much negative rhetoric being thrown back and forth. I know personally that those who believe the church began in Acts 2 adamantly defend their position and will stoop to derogatory name calling and accusations of teaching heresy. It's my desire to take a look at the criticism that is directed toward those of us who believe the church began mid-Acts, especially by those who believe it began in Acts 2.

**Ultradispensationalist**

One of my first observations concerns the labels used to describe the various dispensational groups. Acts 2 people call themselves Dispensationalists and call everyone else ultradispensationalists (or sometimes we are called moderate ultradispensationalists). This came about because they use Charles Ryrie's book, *Dispensationalism*, as their "Bible" to understanding what we believe. Unfortunately, this is like using Sarah Young's book, *Jesus Calling*, to understand Scripture, and just like Young's book can't be trusted to give accurate information, Ryrie's book shows he did not really understand the mid-Acts position. In fact, when I've talked with some mid-Acts teachers, they are surprised that much of what I believe parts with what Ryrie told them I believe. Bottom line, many of their arguments are based on false information often perpetrated by Charles Ryrie.

**Spirit baptism**

Early-Acts adherents believe the giving of the Holy Spirit in Acts 2 is the same as being baptized in Christ by the Holy Spirit. They understand that Spirit baptism took place on the Day of Pentecost, however, they argue that we are also baptized in the Spirit when we are saved. 1 Corinthians 12:13 uses the Greek work *en* which can be translated "by" one Spirit or "in" one Spirit and therefore, it is proper, according to them, to understand that we were baptized into the Holy Spirit, just as they were in Acts 2.

The Acts 2 people really need to do some linguistic gymnastics to make this work. First, the above verse makes it clear that we are put into the Body of Christ, although they say we were put there by Christ and not the Holy Spirit. So, according to them, we are put into the Body of Christ by the baptism of the Holy Spirit. This contradicts Romans 6:3 that states we are baptized *into* Jesus Christ, not just into the Body of Christ. This indicates that someone else needed to do the baptizing, which would need to be the work of the Holy Spirit.

I believe the best way to determine if *en* means "by" or "in" is by examining what baptism is. Even the best Acts 2 believer understands that baptism is identification. Those who were water baptized by John identified with his ministry. Those who refused baptism refused to be identified with Jesus and John (Luke 7:29—30). When the Spirit was poured out on the 120 Israelites in the upper room, we know they were baptized *IN* the Holy Spirit because they were completely identified with the Holy Spirit. This is why they were able to speak in tongues. It was their identification with the Spirit.

Are we, in this Dispensation of Grace, identified with the Holy Spirit or with Christ when we are saved? Obviously, we do not speak in tongues or perform other gifts of the Spirit, however, we are completely identified with Jesus Christ in His death, burial and resurrection. According to Romans 6:4—5, our baptism *INTO* Him leads to our complete identification with Him. We are not baptized *INTO* the Spirit and therefore

we are not identified with the Spirit through the gifts of the Spirit. The Spirit seals us into the Body of Christ. This very simple test helps us to easily determine whether we are baptized into the Spirit or into Christ. By applying this test, it is obvious that Acts 2 could not have been the beginning of the Church, the Body of Christ.

### **Prophecy vs. Mystery**

Mid-Acts believers often argue that Israel was under a prophetic program while the Church, the Body of Christ, was a Mystery, therefore the events in Acts 2 could not have been related to the beginning of the Church because Peter said it was prophesied by Joel. This argument is rejected by Acts 2 believers, pointing out that Paul often went back to Old Testament prophecies to make his point. For instance Paul's message in Acts 13 and the end of Acts 28 is all about the promise of Jesus Christ coming. They also point to God revealing to Paul that he was soon to die as Paul records in 2 Timothy (4:6).

This is a gross misunderstanding of what prophecy and Mystery are all about. Israel's entire program was revealed in such books as Daniel and Revelation. The Church, the Body of Christ, was a complete mystery until revealed from God through the Apostle Paul. Paul used the Old Testament quite often, but only to prove to Israel who their Messiah was. First, he used the Old Testament because that was all the Scripture there was at that time. Second, he used the Old Testament to lay a foundation on which to preach Jesus Christ. He is a common element between Prophecy and Mystery and pulls the two programs together. Third, Paul understood that all Scripture was profitable and powerful (Romans 15:4). Using the Old Testament was effective in convicting people of their need for Christ. Paul needed the Old Testament to build his case for the new Mystery program that God revealed to him. Use of Israel's prophetic program to prove God is doing a new work only strengthens the contrast between the two programs.

### **Last days**

Our Acts 2 brothers understand that Peter was not saying that the last days of Israel's history had arrived when he quoted Joel 2:28 and said that in the last days, that God would pour out His Spirit upon all flesh..." He was merely preaching about what would happen in the last days. They criticize the mid-Acts believers for thinking he was saying the last days had arrived. They prove it by saying that none of the prophetic events happened. God did not pour out His Spirit on all mankind. They did not experience visions and dreams. There were no cosmic events such as the sun turning dark and the moon turning to blood. To them, it seems obvious that the last days were not in view as Peter preached.

That seems like a pretty good argument until you realize that Peter said (under the direction of the Holy Spirit) "But this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel;..." He did not say this is what Joel said, he stated that these things happening are what Joel had written about. Peter continues to equate the giving of the Holy Spirit to Israel with fulfillment of Joel's prophecy in Acts 2:17. This is confirmed in Acts 3:24 where Peter points to other prophets who spoke of the things that were now beginning to happen. But, if these were the last days of Israel's prophetic program, then why didn't the event happen as Joel said they would?

The answer lies in Israel's rejection of their Messiah and the Millennial Kingdom. Obviously, all the events outlined by the prophet Joel would not happen in one day. These things would actually play out over the course of seven to eight years, bringing us to the end of the Tribulation. Matthew 24:29—31 lines up with what Joel had predicted, which brings us up to the Second Coming—the last days. Peter offers the Kingdom to Israel in Acts 3:19. Their response was to stone Stephen, who was speaking on behalf of the Holy Spirit. If Israel had believed and accepted their Messiah, they still would go through the Tribulation to purge the nation of any unbelievers, and then be brought into the Kingdom. However, with their rejection of the offer, God turned to the Gentiles, putting Israel on the back burner, so to speak. Once again, the events of Acts 2 line up perfectly with Israel's prophetic program.

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