

A Mix of Doctrines**Acts 11:19—30**

Peter went to see Cornelius, preached to him, and then experienced God giving the Gentiles the Holy Spirit. This was something so astounding that he was called back to the Hebrew church at Jerusalem to explain his actions to the church leaders. Peter told them what God had done, and they held their peace and gave God the glory for His work among the Gentiles.

Sometime after the council at Jerusalem (Acts 15), Peter went to Antioch where Paul was ministering. When Peter heard that the Hebrew church leaders were coming, he separated himself from the Gentiles. This would have been the proper thing to do before Paul was saved, but now we're seeing whole new set of rules in this Dispensation of Grace. Peter was wrong for separating himself from the Gentiles, and Paul called him out for doing so (Galatians 2).

When Peter reported what happened with Cornelius, the whole Hebrew church at Jerusalem was being shown by God that He was changing the rules. Associating with uncircumcised men, and eating with them, was no longer forbidden (Acts 11:3). Doing this went against the Mosaic law which demanded that Jews were to separate themselves from anything that was unclean, including Gentiles (Exodus 12:48; John 18:28). This was about 10 years after Paul had become saved and the Body of Christ was formed (Acts 9).

Paul and Barnabas

Following the account of Cornelius, we are told that those who were scattered from the persecution following Stephens death were preaching the word only to the Jews. Obviously, they had not received word of any dispensational change, and so they were preaching the gospel they were saved by, the Gospel of the Kingdom. This group included men from the island of Cyprus, and from Cyrene, a county in northern Africa just west of Egypt. Barnabas was originally from Cyprus (Acts 4:36).

Some men from Cyrene and Cyprus came to Antioch and began to preach Jesus Christ. They preached according to Peter in early Acts. Even though they were preaching the Kingdom gospel in the Dispensation of Grace, the Lord was with them and many came to believe. When news of what was happening was reported back to the Jerusalem church, they sent Barnabas to Antioch to check things out. He saw how the hand of the Lord was working in Antioch, and then he went up to Tarsus to find Paul to bring him back to Antioch. Paul and Barnabas stayed in Antioch for an entire year while Paul preached a message that the Lord had personally taught him concerning the mystery (Galatians 1:12). This is how Barnabas, a Kingdom believer, was being prepared to travel with Paul on Paul's first journey and support him in preaching the Gospel of Grace.

Poor saints at Jerusalem

One of the people who came to Antioch from the Hebrew church at Jerusalem was Agabus. The Holy Spirit revealed to him that there would be a great famine during the reign of Claudius (AD 41—54). This event probably happened just before Barnabas and Paul went on their journey, approximately 15 years after the Holy Spirit was given to Israel at Pentecost.

There are at least two reasons these saints in Jerusalem were poor. First, they sold their possessions preparing for the coming Tribulation and final setting up of the Kingdom. All through the four Gospels, believers were expected to sell their possessions and wait for the Kingdom, allowing God to provide for them (Luke 12:32—34). They were to be looking forward to the Kingdom and then they will be rewarded many times the value of what they had given up (Matthew 19:29). Having sold their possessions years ago meant that they now had run out of

money to live on. They were preparing for the Kingdom with Christ supplying everything they needed, but with the dispensational change, that promise had faded off. God now supplies through human means.

Second, there was a famine that came upon the land. This pushed the struggling saints in and around Jerusalem to the limit, and they were no longer able to survive. God is now going to supply them through the Apostle Paul, who took up a collection from churches he visited on his first journey. This is an example for us today, as to how we should look after and lift up each other (Galatians 6:10). The Little Flock was to sell all and wait for the Kingdom, but this would be wrong in this Dispensation of Grace. Those who are able-bodied, but do not work, are condemned by Paul for not providing for their own families (1 Timothy 5:8).

If Israel had accepted Jesus Christ as Messiah, they would have been living in the Millennial Kingdom at this point in the book of Acts. Instead, when they ultimately rejected the testimony of the Holy Spirit through Stephen, God began a work with the Gentiles through the Apostle Paul. This was all planned out from before creation because God already knew Israel would do what they did (Ephesians 1:4).

Dispensational confluence

The book of Acts is a confusing book because there are two different dispensations in play. God was dealing with Israel under her prophetic program, but they rejected God's offer of the Millennial Kingdom. God turned to Paul, formed the Church, the Body of Christ, and revealed what Paul called the Mystery, because it was hidden from ages past (Romans 16:25—26). While one dispensation is being phased out, the other is gaining momentum. While Israel is being taught that they are no longer the vessel of honor they once were, Paul is teaching the Body of Christ that we are now ambassadors with the message of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:19—20). While the ministry of the 12 Disciples is fading off, Paul's ministry is gaining traction.

This mixture of two distinct programs confuses many people because they do not separate them out properly. By studying Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, it is possible to see what belongs to Israel and their promise of a Kingdom. By studying and understanding Paul's 13 Epistles, it is possible to see doctrine specifically given for the Church, the Body of Christ. The book of Acts actually explains the dispensational differences that were happening between the four Gospels and Paul's Epistles.

This change of dispensation can be compared to the weather. It is often difficult to know what season it is by observing the weather. The calendar might say that it is spring, but you are outside shoveling a foot of snow off the driveway. You know it is spring, but everything is telling you it is still winter. As you read through the book of Acts, God continued His work with Israel as He said He would in the Old Testament, up until the stoning of Stephen. At that point, He began a new work with the Gentiles. After Acts 8, it is often very difficult to tell if we are in the Dispensation of Law or the Dispensation of Grace. The determination can be made by knowing when God stopped working with Israel and raised up a new apostle. The events in Acts are not good indicators of what dispensation we are in. Sometimes it looks like two dispensations are in play simultaneously. Other times it looks like God is focused on Israel, and then we see Him dealing with the Church, the Body of Christ. Don't let Acts determine your doctrine, but use it in interpreting your doctrine as you study the surrounding books.

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