

GOSPEL PASSAGES IN ACTS 13-28

In part 1, my conclusion was that *the gospel must be rightly divided*, and that *the gospel of grace has not been revealed at the close of Acts 12*.

In Acts 13:5 Barnabas and Saul (in that order – see v. 1) are found preaching **the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews**. Presumably this **word of God** is the Hebrew Scriptures, for there is no evidence that any revelation is being given (and verses 15-16 support this contention).

In the same chapter, Saul is introduced as Paul, a name that is used exclusively of him from this point, save references to his life prior to this point. Could this be the subtle indication that the *Pauline* mystery has now been given? If this proposal is rejected, one should at least have a suitable substitute proposal since the shift is so consistent.

In verses 15-26, Paul speaks to Jews about the salvation that God promised to Israel (see v. 26). This **salvation** (v. 26) required **the baptism of repentance** (v. 24). In verses 27-29 the death of Jesus is presented, but in a very *bad news* way, placing the blame at Israel's feet. But in verse 30 the resurrection is presented, given basis in Hebrew prophecy, and presented as **glad tidings** (v. 32). Because Jesus is raised from the dead, Israel can accept Him as her Messiah, and God will then give the nation **the sure mercies of David** (v. 34).

In verse 39 Paul says something that has not ever been shared before. That by Jesus Christ, the risen Messiah, **all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses**. Here Paul preaches an individual "gospel" that is outside **the law of Moses** and the only requirement is **believe**. Paul concludes with a warning of "shock and awe" punishment in vv. 40-41, and indication is given in 42 that only the Gentiles had interest in hearing more. In fact, as the chapter continues, the Jews reject this new *Pauline* message, but the Gentiles are very eager to hear more. It is in verse 46 that Paul stated that he will now **turn to the Gentiles**, his ministry changing completely.

Beginning in chapter 14, Gentiles become a major force in *the Gospel*. One should not underestimate how spectacularly different this was from God's previous work. In Acts 14:3, for the first time, the message being presented is now called **the word of his grace**. While the introduction of the *grace Gospel*, if indeed it is in chapters 13-14, is subtle, there is a stark departure from the Kingdom message to a grace message given in 13:39 and 14:3, along with the sudden influx of a Gentile audience (with no indication that they are converting to Judaism). In addition, for the first time this *gospel* is being shared away from the Synagogue.

But with this new addition, the *old message* seems to continue. In fact, in Acts 14:22, Paul encourages the disciples to **continue in the faith** and tells them that it is **through much tribulation** that they will **enter into the kingdom of God**. The most natural conclusion is that a *new Gospel* of individual salvation by faith is being given, but that the Jews should also **continue in the faith** of their Fathers,

since God had apparently not concluded that option for the chosen people. But that a new thing is happening is evidenced in verse 27, since the Jews are astounded, that God **had opened the door of faith unto the Gentiles**.

It is my position that from Acts 13-28 there is an *overlap* of both Gospels, and that great care should be taken to see *which Gospel is in reference*. This would be seen not only in Acts 13-28 but also in the writings of Paul during this period.

It is precisely at this time that **certain men which came down from Judaea taught the brethren, and said, Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved** (Acts 15:1). A serious question that must be answered is this: *why wasn't this an issue earlier, or why is it an issue now?* After all, if there has only been *one gospel* (as Christianity so strongly contends), then why hadn't this become an issue with Jews much earlier? After all, Acts 15 takes place 15 years or more *after* Pentecost. If the gospel since Pentecost was that it was not **needful to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the law of Moses** (v. 5), then *why* was there any need that **the apostles and elders came together for to consider of this matter** (v. 6)? And why, with the church being in **one accord** (Acts 2:46) previously, is there now **much disputing** (v. 7) over an issue that modern Christianity seems to think *could not have been an issue*? Does it really make sense that *the gospel has always been by grace through faith* and now suddenly there is the need for a major meeting on *salvation by grace through faith*?

As evidence that Jews were **to continue in the faith** (Acts 14:22) of the Fathers, immediately after the Jerusalem meeting Paul instructs Timothy, a Jew, to be circumcised (Acts 16:3). Then in Acts 16:30-31 is that famous question, **what must I do to be saved?** The answer, so different from Acts 2:37-38, is simply, **believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved**. This man is almost certainly gentile. He **was baptized** (v. 33), indicating that Baptism, which had been a ceremonial display of repentance for the Jews, could also be used as a ceremonial display of belief for Gentiles.

Most of the remainder of Acts addresses the various trials of Paul. When these trials are analyzed closely, one sees that the accusation was always by Temple officials, claiming that Paul was teaching *Jews* to disregard the Torah. Paul consistently claimed innocence to these charges, and the Scripture consistently says that they were false charges. Careful analysis leads to only one verdict: *Paul preached a freedom from the Law for Gentiles but believed Jews should remain under their covenant obligations*. Once again, this calls for diligence in the interpretation and application of Scripture and is likely the reason that Paul (and only Paul) instructed believers to be **rightly dividing the word of truth** (2 Tim. 2:15).

In fact, the very last verse of Acts tells us that Paul, though under house arrest, spent his time **Preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ** (Acts 28:31). Clearly a kingdom message was still in order. But could it also be that the little conjunction **and** is of greatest importance? That is, that **those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ** are *in addition to* the message of **the kingdom of God**? Personally, I think there is plenty of evidence that *the Gospel under which we are saved* is not the Gospel of the Kingdom, but rather the Gospel of the **dispensation of the grace of God** (Eph. 3:2).