

SPECIAL EDITION

**A defense of the expectation
of the body of Christ, Part 5:**

The Status of the Body of Christ Prior to Acts 28:28



How is that for a sexy title? It's not my title: Aaron Welch came up with it. I like it, though. It's sexy in its own way. It gets right to the point of a matter of concern to those of us wishing to read Paul's letters aright. In this extra edition of the ZWTF, Aaron Welch refutes an article by Adlai Loudy, reprinted in the *Bible Student's Notebook*, suggesting that, up until the time Paul writes the book of Ephesians, the nations were still subservient to the nation Israel. Aaron says, "no way" (I'm paraphrasing him) and I agree with him. The body of Christ came into its own very early in Paul's ministry. In fact, it happened on Day 1. Here is the article, reprinted from Aaron's blog, "That Happy Expectation," reprinted in its entirety.

The Status of the Body of Christ Prior to Acts 28:28

by Aaron Welch¹

According to the position being promoted in recent issues of *Bible Student's Notebook*,^[1] the status of the body of Christ radically changed after Acts 28:28. According to this view, Gentile believers in Paul's gospel were, prior to Paul's imprisonment in Rome, subservient to the nation of Israel. Not only did they not have a distinct eonian allotment of their own among the celestials during this time, but they were to have a *subordinate place* in the earthly kingdom of Israel (as had been prophesied concerning the nations in the Hebrew scriptures; see, for example, Isaiah 60:10-12; 61:5-6; Zechariah 8:20-23). In contrast to this position, I believe that Scripture affirms that the body of Christ has always been an entity completely distinct from Israel, with an eonian allotment in the heavens that is completely distinct from the terrestrial allotment of Israel.

1. Footnotes at end of article. Subheadings are mine.

APPARENT CONTRADICTION

In his article “The Readjustment Administration,” Adlai Loudy references Ephesians 2:12 in support of the position that, during the time period prior to Acts 28:28, the nations were subservient to the nation of Israel. In this verse, Paul tells us that the nations to whom he wrote were “in that era, apart from Christ, being alienated from the citizenship of Israel, and guests of the promise covenants, having no expectation, and without God in the world.” But what “era” is Paul talking about here? Is it the time period from Acts 13:2 to Acts 28:28 (which Loudy refers to as the “readjustment administration”)? I don’t think so.

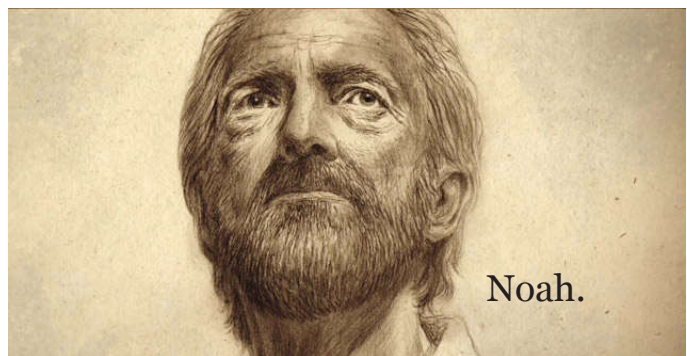
How could anyone who is “in Christ,” “a new creation” and “conciliated to God” (2 Cor. 5:17-18) be, at the same time, “without Christ” and “without God in the world?” Would this not be a contradiction? It seems far more likely that the “era” Paul has in view in this verse is simply the time period which he describes at the beginning of chapter 2 - i.e., the time during which those to whom he wrote were walking in their offenses and sins, “in accord with the eon of this world, in accord with the chief of the jurisdiction of the air” (Eph. 2:1-2). The “era” Paul has in view can therefore be understood as the time period prior to when the evangel of peace came to them (Eph. 2:17) and they heard and believed the word of truth, the evangel of [their] salvation (Eph 1:13). If this is the case, then this verse has nothing to do with an inferior, pre-Acts 28:28 administration. Paul is simply referring to their life before they believed his gospel and became members of the body of Christ.

“CITIZENSHIP OF ISRAEL”

But what is the “citizenship of Israel,” from which the nations were “alienated” during the era that Paul has in view in Eph 2:1-3? The word “citizenship” (*politeia*) is only meaningful if a particular political entity - i.e., a nation or city - is in view. But what political entity? I believe the most likely political entity to which this “citizenship” refers is the new Jerusalem. Understood in this way, the “citizenship of Israel” refers to the status of those who will dwell in the new Jerusalem during the final eon of the “new heaven and new earth” (Rev. 21:1-2). In accordance with this view, the “covenants of promise” may be understood as the covenants that God made with Israel that pertain to the promised blessings that Israel will enjoy during the eons to come (such as

the Abrahamic covenant, the Davidic covenant and the new covenant).

Prior to Paul’s evangel and the creation of the body of Christ, the greatest eonian blessing that a non-Israelite could enjoy was eonian life on the new earth, during the final eon. Peter, we’re told, learned that “God shows no partiality,” and that “in EVERY nation, ANYONE who fears God and does what is right is acceptable to him” (Acts 10:34-35). All such people among the nations will, I believe, enjoy eonian life (as mortals) on the new earth. We’re told that the nations at this time will walk by the light of the New Jerusalem, and that the kings of the earth will bring the glory and honor of the nations into this city (Rev 21:22-26). These Gentiles will have access to the city and will eat from the trees of life, and will enjoy healing from its leaves (Rev 22:1-2). And in Hebrews we learn that God prepared this city not only for Abraham and his believing Jewish descendents, but for righteous, God-fearing Gentiles such as Abel, Enoch and Noah (Heb 11:13-16).



A NEW EONIAN ALLOTMENT

But in Ephesians, Paul is speaking to Gentiles who had, prior to becoming members of the body of Christ, lost this eonian expectation. They were without “expectation” and “without God in the world.” Why? Because, formerly, they had walked “in the futility of their minds” (Eph 4:17). In this previous state they were “darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that [was] in them, due to their hardness of heart” (v. 18). In Col. 1:21, Paul says that those to whom he wrote were “once alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds.” It was because of this that Paul considered them as “having no expectation, and without God in the world.” Because of their failure to do that which makes one acceptable to God, they had forfeited the eonian blessing on the new earth that would’ve been

theirs had they lived a righteous life (like that of Abel, Job, Noah, etc.).

However, Paul's argument is not that the believing Gentiles to whom he wrote were now able to enjoy eonian life on the new earth with faithful Israelites. Rather, they had, "in one spirit," all "been baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free," and all were made to "imbibe one spirit" (1 Cor. 12:12-13). Having become members of the body of Christ (v. 27), they had become part of a "new humanity" where there is "no Greek or Jew, Circumcision and Uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, slave, freeman" (Col. 3:11; see also Gal. 3:28). When those to whom Paul wrote believed his distinct "evangel of the uncircumcision" they (we!) received a *new* eonian expectation and allotment. This eonian allotment is "in the heavens" (2 Cor. 5:1-2) and "among the celestials" (Eph 2:6). It is not associated with the "citizenship of Israel," but is entirely distinct from it.

"This eonian allotment 'in the heavens' is entirely distinct from the 'citizenship of Israel.'"

THE COLLECTION FOR THE POOR

In addition to Ephesians 2:12, Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 16:1-4, 2 Corinthians 8-9 and Romans 15:25-32 are viewed by proponents of the Acts 28:28 dispensational theory as being in conflict with the position that the Gentiles who believed Paul's gospel before his imprisonment had, during this time, an eonian allotment distinct from Israel's. In these passages, Paul speaks of making financial contributions to, and taking up a collection for, the poor saints in Jerusalem. Can we account for this without appealing to the view that the Gentiles in the body of Christ were, before Paul's imprisonment, dependent on Israel for their eonian allotment, and were to have an inferior and subordinate place in the millennial kingdom? I think so.

In Galatians 2, Paul recounts the private meeting he had with Peter, James and John in Jerusalem, concerning his commission. In verses 9-10, Paul writes, "...knowing the grace which is being given to me, James and Cephas and John, who are supposed to be pillars, give to me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, that we, indeed, are to be for the nations, yet they for the Circumcision—only that we may be remembering the poor, which same

thing I endeavor also to do." Concerning this agreement between the apostles, A.E. Knoch writes,

There was a mutual understanding arrived at among them that they [Peter, James and John] would confine themselves to the Circumcision, while Paul and Barnabas went to the nations. This agreement should have kept the judaizing disturbers of the Galatian believers from interfering with them. Paul kept his part of the compact, especially that which concerned the collection for the poor saints in Judea.



This agreement with Peter, James and John, then, is the original and primary reason why the body of Christ made financial contributions to the poor saints in Jerusalem. The fact that Paul honored the special request of Peter, James and John and "kept his part of the compact" in no way means that the Gentiles in the body of Christ were, at this time, "second class citizens" in relation to believing Israelites. Let's assume, for the sake of argument, that my understanding of the status of the body of Christ prior to Acts 28:28 is correct, and that those who believed Paul's "evangel of the uncircumcision" had their own distinct eonian allotment even before Paul's

imprisonment. Are we to imagine that Paul, in this case, would've flat-out refused to honor the request of Peter, James and John that they remember the poor saints in Jerusalem? Is it really reasonable to believe that Paul, in this case, would have said to these men of God, "Sorry, guys. The only poor saints with whom the body of Christ is concerned are those who are IN the body of Christ. You guys are on your own." That Paul would respond to their special request in this way seems highly unlikely (and out of character), to say the least. Not only was Paul's doing what he could to honor their special request the most loving and gracious thing to do, but it would've served to reduce the tension and growing hostility on the side of the circumcision saints, and helped to promote peace between the two groups of believers.

"SPIRITUAL THINGS"

But what about what Paul's words in Romans 15:25-33? What are the "spiritual things" of the poor saints in Jerusalem in which the nations participated? And in what sense could the nations be considered "debtors" to these Jewish saints? I see no good reason to understand these "spiritual things" as referring to, or including, the conian destiny of the body of Christ. Although Paul doesn't elaborate on what he means here by "spiritual things," I believe it can be reasonably inferred that Paul is referring to the "spiritual endowments" (or spiritual gifts) described in 1 Cor. 12:1-11. We know that Paul (as well as certain others in the body of Christ) once possessed various spiritual endowments. But how did they receive these spiritual gifts, and what purpose did they serve at this time? I believe these supernatural gifts served the following purpose with regards to the body of Christ:

NEED FOR SIGNS DIMINISHES

1. First, the miracles that were performed through Paul (including any spiritual gifts that were given to others through him) were the signs of his special apostleship and authority from the Lord (2 Cor. 12:12; Gal 2:7). These signs and gifts authenticated Paul's unique apostleship and apostolic authority (and thus legitimized his distinct ministry) in the sight of the nations to whom he was sent, as well as those among the Jewish remnant (i.e., the twelve apostles and those who believed their gospel of the circumcision). It was through these "signs, miracles and powerful deeds" that both the nations as

well as Peter and the saints in Jerusalem were assured that Christ had in fact commissioned Paul to bring salvation to the nations (Acts 9:15; 15:12; 22:21). In connection with this, it was the assurance of Paul's apostleship that enabled his writings to be viewed and accepted as inspired Scripture - not just by the nations to whom Paul was commissioned, but by the apostles of the circumcision as well (see 2 Pet. 3:15-16). As the end of Paul's apostolic ministry drew nearer, the need for such authenticating signs began to diminish, and miraculous healings consequently became less frequent. Although Paul raised Eutychus from the dead (Acts 20:9-12), he didn't heal Epaphroditus (Phil. 2:25-27), Timothy (1 Tim 5:23) or Trophimus (2 Tim. 4:20). **Because the purpose of this supernatural gift was to authenticate his apostleship during the establishment of the ecclesias to which he would be writing (see the second point), a time inevitably came when further miracles became unnecessary.**

"The closer we get to the end of the completion of God's written revelation, the less miraculous activity takes place."

2. Secondly, it is important to keep in mind that the written revelation to the body of Christ was, prior to Paul's imprisonment in Rome, incomplete. It was not until after Paul was imprisoned that he finally completed the word of God (Col. 1:25). Therefore, the gifts of prophecy, knowledge, wisdom, etc., were necessary in order for the believers to know what God would have them believe and do in Paul's absence. These gifts enabled believers to communicate new truth and revelation from God. Now that God's revelation to the body of Christ is complete, these revelatory gifts are no longer needed. Concerning the gift of prophecy, A.E. Knoch writes, "Paul's high regard for the gift of prophecy is founded on the fact that it was the chief means used to bring the saints to that maturity which he earnestly desired they should attain. The gift of teaching, the exposition of the Scriptures, now takes the place of prophecy, for God has fully revealed His will in His word."

As already noted, the closer we get to the end of Paul's apostolic ministry and to the completion of God's written

revelation to the body of Christ, the less miraculous activity we find taking place (2 Tim 4:20). In view of the purpose the spiritual endowment served among the body of Christ, this decrease in miraculous activity makes perfect sense. There is no need to appeal to a supposed “administrational change” (let alone a change in the eonian destiny of the body of Christ) in order to account for it. Paul knew that the miraculous gifts would not be permanent among the body of Christ and, as early as his first epistle to the Corinthians, began preparing believers for the time when they would cease (1 Cor. 13:8). But even as late as Paul’s first letter to Timothy, we read of the “laying on of hands” (1 Tim 5:22), which was the means through which people received their spiritual endowments (I’ll have more to say about this later).

THE ENDOWMENT OF LANGUAGES

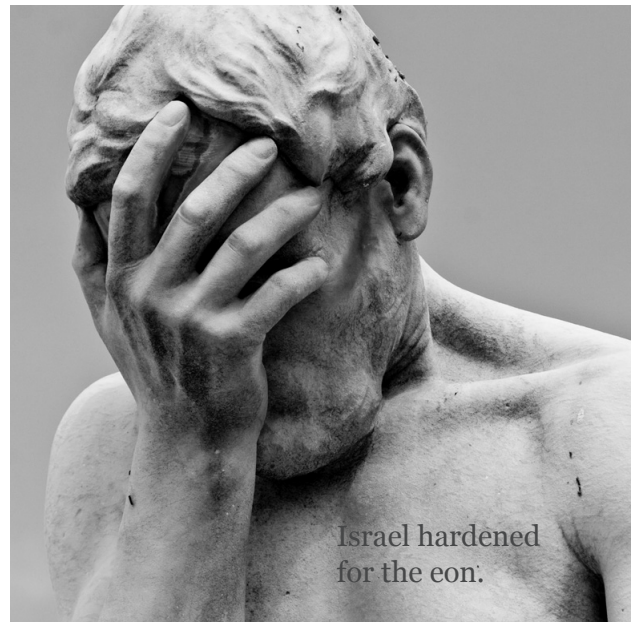
But what about the spiritual endowment of “tongues” or “languages” (i.e., the supernatural ability to speak in a foreign language)? It would seem that this particular spiritual gift was of a very limited use in the body of Christ, and was considered by Paul to be the least of all the spiritual gifts. Although those who possessed this gift may have enjoyed a “spiritual high” whenever they exercised their supernatural ability (who wouldn’t?), the gift did not edify, console or comfort other members of the ecclesia, as did the exercise of the gift of prophecy (1 Cor. 14:1-5). Unless one was able to interpret that which was uttered in a foreign language, the exercise of this gift was just a vain display of supernatural ability and nothing more. As Knoch notes, “It may be imposing and spectacular but it fails utterly in edifying the saints.” So for what purpose was this gift present within the ecclesia in Corinth?

“Now that God’s revelation to the body of Christ is complete, these revelatory gifts are no longer needed.”

In 1 Cor. 14:22, Paul writes that the exercise of this gift was “a sign, not to the believers, but to the unbelievers” (1 Cor. 14:22). In light of what Paul says here, it may be that the exercise of this gift was intended to be a sign to unbelieving Israelites (i.e., those who had believed nei-

ther Paul’s gospel nor Peter’s) that judgment was coming upon their nation. Support for this view is Paul’s quotation of Isaiah 28:11-12. Right before Paul tells the Corinthians that “languages are a sign, not to the believers, but to the unbelievers,” he says, “In the law it is written that, In different languages and by different lips shall I speak to this people, and neither thus will they be hearing to Me, the Lord is saying” (1 Cor. 14:21). Knoch notes in his commentary that this sign was “not for believers, or even to reach unbelievers.” Since the verses from Isaiah indicate that the foreign language of the Assyrians was a sign to unbelieving Israel that judgment was coming on them, Knoch is probably correct here.

We know that the majority of Israelites were in unbelief in Paul’s day; except for a chosen remnant, Israel had been calloused by God and given a “spirit of stupor,” with “eyes not to be observing, and ears not to be hearing, till this very day” (Rom. 11:7-8). Paul goes on to speak of Israel as having been “cast away” a few verses later (v. 15). We also know that there was, in fact, a severe judgment coming upon the Jewish nation because of their rejection of Christ. Right after his triumphal entry, Christ himself prophesied



Israel hardened for the eon.

of the judgment that was coming upon Israel as a result of her apostasy (see Luke 19:41-44; Matt. 23:36-39; 24:2). It is reasonable to conclude, then, that the gift of tongues was intended to be a sign to the unbelieving Jews in Corinth (and wherever else this spiritual gift was present and being exercised) that God was soon going to be bringing judgment upon the Jewish nation.[2]

LIMITED PURPOSE OF THE GIFTS

While it is common for proponents of the Acts 28:28 position to point out that the miraculous gift of tongues/languages is not mentioned in Paul's prison epistles (which is said to imply that this gift had, by this time, ceased, and that Acts 28:28 must have been the "dispensational dividing line" that resulted in its ceasing), the proponents of this position seem to overlook the fact that, when Paul describes the various spiritual gifts in the body of Christ in Romans 12:3-8, this gift is not mentioned, either. Thus, if the lack of mention of the gift of tongues in Ephesians should be understood to mean that the gift had ceased before Paul wrote this letter, then consistency demands that a similar lack of mention of this gift in his letter to the Romans (in the context of spiritual gifts) would mean that the gift ceased even before Paul's imprisonment. It is likely that, by this time, this particular gift had served its limited purpose and had either been removed by God, or was simply no longer being exercised by members of the body of Christ.

DEBTORS TO THE SAINTS IN JERUSALEM?

None of the reasons given above for why the body of Christ participated in certain "spiritual things" at this time in any way supports the position that believing Gentiles were, prior to Acts 28:28, dependent on Israel for their eonian allotment, or had a subordinate place in the earthly kingdom of Israel. The purpose that these gifts served at this time implies that the body of Christ was, even before Paul's imprisonment, an entity completely distinct from Israel. Unlike the Jews and Gentile proselytes who believed Peter's "evangel of the circumcision," members of the body of Christ (for whom racial and national distinctions were entirely irrelevant) had their own distinct apostle (Paul) and their own distinct scriptures (Paul's letters). And in these scriptures, Paul was making known secrets concerning them - secrets which were untraceable in the Hebrew scriptures, and which had nothing to do with Israel's eonian allotment on earth. Moreover, members of the body of Christ (many of whom were former idol-worshipping pagans) did not participate in these "spiritual things" because they had blessed the nation of Israel. Nor did their spiritual gifts exalt or glorify Israel (and with regards to the gift of languages, it can be argued that the exact opposite was the case). But in what sense, then, can it be said that the body of Christ participated in the spiritual things of

the saints in Jerusalem, and were thus "debtors" to them?

To answer this question, let's ask: To whom were these spiritual endowments first given? They most certainly weren't originally given to members of the body of Christ (for when these spiritual gifts first appeared, there *was* no body of Christ). No, they were given to Jewish saints in Jerusalem, on Pentecost (Acts 2:1-4). It was the Jewish saints who were present at this time who were first "filled with holy spirit," and who were thus the original recipients of the "spiritual things" in which those in the body of Christ would later be participating. It is for this reason that Paul refers to the "spiritual things" in which the nations participated as "*their* [the Jerusalem saints'] spiritual things." It was to the Jewish saints in Jerusalem that the spiritual things were first given.

Now, by what means was this supernatural power/spiritual endowment transferred after its original bestowment on Jewish believers at Pentecost? As noted earlier, this supernatural power was transferred from person to person through the laying on of hands (Acts 8:17-19; 19:4-6; 2 Tim. 1:6-7). Not even Paul was an exception to this rule, for in Acts 9:17 we read, "Now Ananias [a Jewish saint in Damascus] came away and entered the house, and placing his hands on him, he said, 'Saul! Brother! The Lord has commissioned me (Jesus, Who was seen by you on the road by which you came), so that you should be receiving sight and be filled with holy spirit.'" Thus, it was by means of Ananias that Paul was "filled with holy spirit" and thereby given his supernatural power. And significantly, the first manifestation

**"Members of the body of
Christ had their own distinct
Scriptures."**





of the supernatural power that Paul received is recorded in Acts 13:8-12. There, we're told that Paul (Saul), "being filled with holy spirit," pronounced a curse on the Jewish false prophet, Bar-Jesus, which resulted in his immediately becoming blind.

But from whom did Ananias receive the supernatural power which he passed on to Paul? Because the holy spirit was transferred through the laying on of hands, it can be inferred that Ananias ultimately received it (either directly or indirectly) from one of the saints who was present in Jerusalem on Pentecost. So we see that it was because of the saints in Jerusalem that Paul - the first member of the body of Christ - was filled with holy spirit and received his spiritual endowment. And the same could be said for every other member of the body of Christ who possessed a spiritual endowment at this time (and who, whether directly or indirectly, likely received their spiritual endowments through Paul).

This, then, is why Paul could speak of the nations to whom he wrote as being "debtors" to the saints in Jerusalem. For, relatively speaking, the body of Christ would not have enjoyed the benefit of the spiritual endowments had it not been for the saints in Jerusalem (who were the original recipients of the holy spirit and super-

natural power that was eventually given to Paul through Ananias). It would seem, then, that Paul saw their participation in the spiritual gifts as an additional, or secondary, reason for financially helping the poor saints in Jerusalem (as he had, years ago, agreed to do during the meeting with Peter, James and John). But their "debt" to the saints in Jerusalem had nothing to do with the eonian allotment of the body of Christ, or with their being "subservient to Israel" during this time. For the reasons given above, the "spiritual things" (spiritual endowments/gifts) in which the nations participated were for the blessing and edification of the body of Christ (not Israel) - and that, only for a temporary period of time. The "spiritual things" in which the body of Christ participated were simply a means to an end, and that end had nothing to do with the preeminence of Israel over the body of Christ (either at that time, or in the future), or with Israel's eonian allotment. Rather, they had to do with the formation of the body of Christ through the sign-accompanied apostolic ministry of Paul, and with the progressive completion of God's written revelation to the body of Christ, through Paul. —**Aaron Welch**

<http://thathappyexpectation.blogspot.com.br/2015/05/the-status-of-body-of-christ-prior-to.html>

FOOTNOTES

[1] See, for example, Adlai Loudy's article, "The Readjustment Administration," as featured in BSN #492 (<http://www.biblestudentsnotebook.com/bsn492.pdf>).

[2] Another possibility is that the gift of languages was meant to be a sign to those Jews who, although having been converted through the ministry of the twelve apostles, did not believe (or would not have believed) that God was working through Paul to form a new body of believers consisting primarily of Gentiles, and that God was among them. Understood in this way, this gift would've served a similar purpose as the other gifts which served to legitimize Paul's apostleship, ministry and message

