



Exposing the “two bodies of Christ” deception.



In my opinion, Aaron Welch of South Carolina has become our top scholar. In Aaron Welch we have a man able in the Scriptures, full of the spirit of God, who invests hours *for our sakes* as he refutes false teachings that have arisen in our midst. As we are all painfully aware, not even the body of Christ is immune to error. I'm not, you're not, and Aaron Welch would admit that he is not. The safeguard against such error is the ability to think critically (rather than emotionally) in order to detect fallacious argument and to apply the apparently rare gift of logic to any proposition. God has blessed our brother Aaron with not only these abilities but—grace upon grace—the man can write good sentences.

I must have been somewhat distracted last March and did not fully appreciate a series of articles written by Mr. Welch that refuted Stephen Hill's offering in the *Bible Student's Notebook*, “Proof of Paul's Progression.” As you know, the *Bible Student's Notebook* has been in the business lately of trying to convince us that our apostle Paul must be divided against himself. According to modern

proponents of this theory such as Clyde Pilkington and Stephen Hill, we must no longer think of Paul's letters as a whole, but rather we must learn to break them into “pre-prison” and “post-prison” pieces. Why pre and post *prison* pieces? Because it was from his prison in Rome where, for the last time in the Greek Scriptures (Acts 28:28), Israel was formally pronounced apostate, this time by Paul. What the Acts 28:28 theorists do not realize is that Israel had already been cast away by God years before, with Acts 28:28 being but the latest and final formal announcement of it. The Acts 28:28 theorists, however, build a theme park at this juncture of Scripture, believing it to be the *moment* of Israel's setting aside by God.

This is a substantial mistake. Israel had already demonstrated herself as humanly irredeemable as a nation could be when she murdered her own Messiah. God graphically formalized the great falling away into an epochal casting off when He supernaturally ripped the temple veil in two at the very same moment—it wasn't a coincidence—that His Son died on the cross.

Now Jesus, again crying with a loud voice, lets out the spirit. And lo! the curtain of the temple is rent in two from above to the bottom, and the earth quaked, and the rocks are rent (Matthew 27:51-52).

What a monumental confluence of events. If we are to look for the moment when Israel was cast away, could there be any more red flags attached to any single event than this one? If we're going to build a theme park, why not build one *here*?

What of Acts 28:28 then? It is merely another historical verification—this time in the form of a formal trial—of an already-accomplished fact. This and other testimonies will be used against/for Israel at the Great White throne to convict her of rejecting her Messiah in every way possible and at every turn. A cursory glance at



the passage itself should convince any objective student that this was merely the corroboration of an historical fact. Paul tells the Jews (note the tense of the verb), “To the nations *was* dispatched this salvation of God”—Acts 28:28), yet the theorists come on with their food courts, hotels and parking lots, as though this were the main event and that now, after thirty or so years of labor, the apostle of the nations can finally go to the actual nations. *Really?* Acts 28:28 is merely an intersection on the eonian way. This is the opposite of a tourist destination.

Why the motive to build a complicated theory around this passage in the first place? Probably because the presence of spiritual gifts and things like baptism and miracles at the beginning of Paul’s ministry throw the Acts 28:28 theorists for a loop. They can’t understand why some things would be applicable at the beginning of Paul’s ministry and not at the end. There are reasonable and very simply explanations for this, of course, which Mr. Welch will detail for us shortly. The most unreasonable and painfully complicated explanation (more complicated even than building a magic castle) is that there have been two bodies of Christ since the time of Paul, one still subservient to Israel during Paul’s early ministry, and one finally free of Israel during Paul’s later few years. Two bodies of Christ! Can you imagine?

To the first body of Christ Paul wrote his early letters, namely Romans, 1 & 2 Thessalonians, 1 & 2 Corinthians, Galatians, and whatever else. To the second body of Christ he wrote his later letters, namely 2 Timothy, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and whatever else. The reason I say “whatever else” is because few scholars

agree on the dates of Paul’s letters. And yet the knowledge of the dates of Paul’s letters are critical to the Acts 28:28 theory. How else are we supposed to properly divide Paul’s letters either before or after Paul’s Acts 28:28 announcement? If it’s so necessary and so important to know which letters are ours today and which aren’t, and if the only way we can know is by the dates of the letters, then why didn’t God ensure that the dates could be readily known, or at least researchable?

But back to this two bodies of Christ thing. According to the Acts 28:28 theorists, the first body of Christ is obsolete, and so are the letters written to it. Only the letters Paul wrote *after* he was imprisoned in Rome (and after his Acts 28:28 pronouncement) are for us, the members of the *second* body of Christ. Again, no one knows exactly which letters those are. Take your guess. We do know that Romans was an early letter. According to this theory, then, the book of Romans is not written to us. I’m serious. We can still glean truth from such an obsolete book such as “Romans,” but the words of Romans are no more ours than the words of Leviticus. They belong to a bygone era. They’re *quaint*.

“Wouldn’t it be great if all of Paul’s letters were one ever-brightening load of truth for the one body of Christ?”

Wouldn’t it be great if you didn’t have to know something that God has not revealed in His Word? Wouldn’t it be great if you didn’t have to sweat through extra-Biblical history to discover what year, exactly, Paul occupied his Roman prison? Wouldn’t it be great if all of Paul’s letters, authenticated by the presence of his name, were one ever-brightening load of truth for the one body of Christ? Wouldn’t the very simplicity of this be a huge relief to you? Well, happy day! This is how it is. Dividing Paul from the Circumcision message is a difficult enough task; God is not asking us to divide Paul himself around dates that

God has not burdened us to know. The Acts 28:28 theory is a complicated mess that only the theorists themselves can explain, and none of them logically.

I refuted this teaching myself over two years ago (see the links below), but the thing just keeps coming up like a bad weed. Fortunately, there's another gardener on the premises besides myself, carrying a 1.33 gallon jug of Roundup.

I commend to you the writing of Mr. Aaron Welch.

Acts 28 Dispensationalism Revisited: A Response to "Proof of Paul's Progression" (Part One)

by Aaron Welch

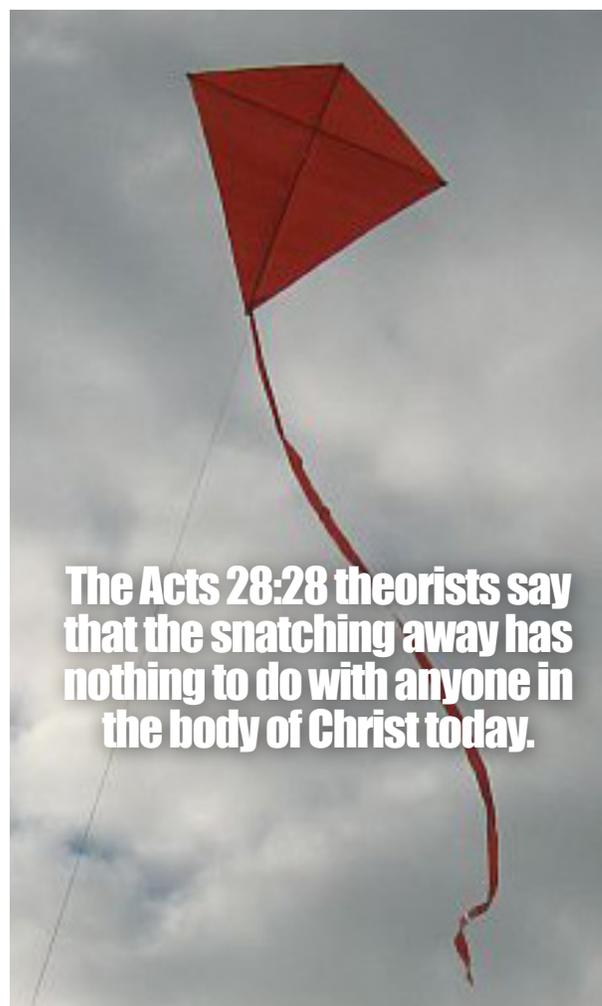
(The following are excerpts. To read the entire article and to access Mr. Welch's footnotes, see the link at the end of each part.)

Beginning around issue 485, Bible Student's Notebook (BSN) has been promoting a variation of [the Acts 28:28 position], with the only difference being that the body of Christ is viewed as having existed (at least, in name) before Paul's imprisonment in Rome. According to this slightly modified and "softened" Acts 28 position, Paul's imprisonment in Rome marked a change in both his dispensation/administration and the status and destiny of the body of Christ. Before Paul's imprisonment, the eonian allotment of those who composed the body of Christ is viewed as having been inseparable from, and dependent on, Israel's eonian (and earthly) expectation. However, after Paul was imprisoned (and Israel was "set aside"), those in the body of Christ received (or were then able to receive) a new eonian allotment that was/is distinct from Israel's – i.e., eonian life in the heavens.

Proponents of this position sometimes speak of Paul's ministry as having been "transitional" and "progressive." This would hardly be controversial if, by this, they simply meant that Paul didn't reveal everything to the body of Christ all at once, but rather revealed (or recorded in written form) certain truths to the saints at different points during his ministry until everything that was necessary for the body of Christ to know during this present administration had been made known, and the scriptures that God wanted us to have were completed. I'm not sure of anyone who would deny (or has denied) this aspect of Paul's ministry, regardless of their "dispensational" position. The position being promoted in BSN is, however,

much more controversial (and, I believe, problematic) than this, and has huge implications concerning how relevant and applicable Paul's "pre-prison" letters are to the body of Christ today.

One of the most alarming features of this position – at least, as it has been articulated by proponents such as Clyde Pilkington and Stephen Hill - is that what Paul revealed concerning the snatching away of believers to meet Christ in the air (along with the resurrection and "change" which is to immediately precede this event) has nothing directly to do with anyone in the body of Christ today. Rather, these things are believed to pertain exclusively to believing Jews and Gentile proselytes who are destined for Israel's eonian allotment. Significantly,



A.E. Knoch (who is often appealed to and quoted in support of this position) did not even go this far, but consistently maintained that Paul's words concerning this event are just as applicable to the saints in the body

<http://martinzender.com/ZWTF/ZWTF4.19.pdf>

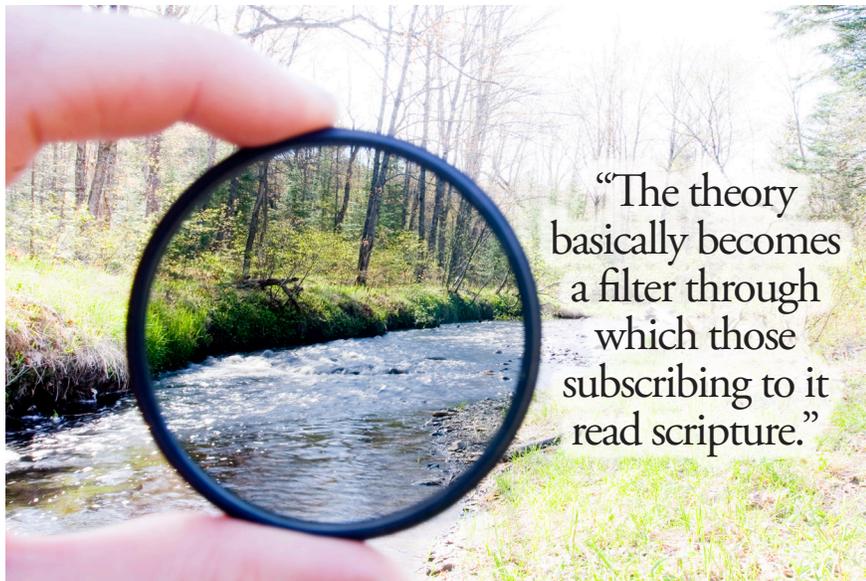
<http://martinzender.com/ZWTF/ZWTF4.21.pdf>

<http://martinzender.com/ZWTF/ZWTF4.23.pdf>

<http://martinzender.com/ZWTF/ZWTF4.24.pdf>

of Christ today as they were when Paul first wrote them. According to Knoch, the truth made known by Paul in 1 Thess. 4:13-18 and 1 Corinthians 15:50-55 (for example) belongs just as much to the present administration as does anything written in his “prison epistles.” But according to the dispensational position being promoted in BSN, what Paul made known in these passages is no more relevant or applicable to the body of Christ today than John’s words in Revelation 19:11-21.

The ongoing defense of this position by BSN continues in issue 529 with an article by Stephen Hill entitled “Proof of Paul’s Progression.” It seems to be a common practice among those subscribing to the Acts 28 dis-



pensational position to view scriptural data that can be interpreted as being consistent with this position as evidence for the position, while failing to take into account data that does not fit with the theory (the theory basically becomes a filter through which those subscribing to it read scripture). Unfortunately, it seems as if Stephen has fallen into this trap. Like many proponents of the Acts 28 position, Stephen has a tendency to draw the reader’s attention to data that could be considered as being consistent with his position (e.g., Paul’s custom of visiting the synagogues on the Sabbath), as if this data constituted compelling evidence for the position. However, that which he has pointed to as supporting his position is, as we’ll see, equally consistent with non-Acts 28 positions (such as the one I’ll be defending in this article). But even more problematic for Stephen is that he has not taken into account data that outright contradicts his position (e.g., those passages

which, as we’ll see later, make it clear that Paul’s ministry prior to his imprisonment in Rome involved heralding the truth to people indiscriminately – which included pagan, non-proselytized Gentiles).

Dating Paul’s Letters: A Preliminary Problem for the “Acts 28” Position

According to the Acts 28 position, our understanding of which truths in Paul’s letters are most applicable - and which are least applicable - to the body of Christ today depends on our having an accurate knowledge of which of Paul’s letters were written before, and which were written during (or after), his first imprisonment in Rome, as referred to at the end of Acts. That is, Stephen’s position presupposes, and can’t even get off of the ground apart from, the following being true: (1) some of Paul’s letters were, in fact, written while (or after) Paul was under house-arrest in Rome, as described in Acts 28:30-31, and (2) we have accurate knowledge of which of Paul’s letters were written during this period, and which weren’t. Now, Stephen may feel confident regarding his knowledge of which of Paul’s letters were written during (or after) his two-year imprisonment in Rome. However, not only is there difference of opinion on this matter among students of scripture, but there is ample room for disagreement on this matter.

Consider, for example, the dates of Paul’s letters for which John A.T. Robinson carefully argues in chapter three of his groundbreaking book, *Redating the New Testament* (1976). According to what Robinson believes to be the most probable dates, 1 Timothy was written in the autumn of 55, Titus was written in the late spring of 57, and the remainder of Paul’s “prison epistles” were written in AD 58, during the spring (Philippians), summer (Philemon, Colossians, Ephesians) and fall (2 Timothy). These dates – if correct – would not just be problematic for Stephen’s position. They would refute it altogether. Although Paul was indeed a prisoner circa A.D. 58-60, his imprisonment was not in the city of Rome, but rather in Caesarea (Acts 24:22-27). If Robinson’s dates are correct (and they may very well be, either in part or in whole), Stephen’s position concerning how Paul’s letters should be “divided” (with

Acts 28:25-28 being the “dispensational dividing line,” so to speak) would be completely undermined.

The very foundation of Stephen’s dispensational position is only as firm as the correctness of the dates he believes should be assigned to Paul’s letters. But Stephen simply cannot prove beyond a reasonable doubt that the dates he has assigned to Paul’s letters are correct. Nor can Stephen prove beyond a reasonable doubt that the letters Paul wrote while a prisoner were written while he was in Rome rather than in Caesarea. It’s also possible that only one of Paul’s prison letters – i.e., his letter to the Philippians - was written while he was a prisoner in Rome, while Philemon, Ephesians and Colossians were all written while he was imprisoned in Caesarea. And there are undoubtedly other views that one could take, and for which one could argue. Insofar as Stephen has not proven (and, I believe, cannot prove beyond a reasonable doubt) that the dates he thinks should be assigned to Paul’s prison letters are, in fact, the correct dates, his entire dispensational position rests entirely on assumptions with which no student of the scriptures need feel obligated to share.

André Piet sums up the problem that is involved with dividing up Paul’s letters based on an Acts 28 “dispensational dividing line”:

How do we know what Paul has written before and after Acts 28:28? A number of letters of Paul are easily dated on the basis of Acts, but for most of them, this does not work. The well-known E. W. Bullinger (Companion Bible) said that seven letters were written by Paul, after Acts 28. But others believe that this is to be limited to four letters. Still others claim that it is only three. And yet again others assert it is two letters: Ephesians and Colossians. And even that is not 100% sure because these letters could have been written during the two years that Paul was a prisoner in Caesarea. Would the Acts 28:28 opinion be correct, it is essential to have a definitive answer on what is before and after Acts 28. The mere fact that this dating in Scripture is missing, is a clear indication that this view is irrelevant” (<http://goedbericht.nl/english/once-again-acts-2828/>).

My friend Travis Penner echoed this sentiment with the following remark:

It is ridiculous to think that God would become so esoteric as to require us to date each of Paul’s letters in order to figure out which dispensation he is writing about.” The very fact that God did not see fit to reveal the dates at which Paul wrote his letters should be a red flag to all

students of scripture as to the dubious nature of a dispensational position whose entire foundation rests on our ability to accurately date Paul’s letters.

(For the full transcript of Part 1, click here:

<http://thathappyexpectation.blogspot.pe/2016/03/acts-28-dispensationalism-revisited.html>)

PART 2

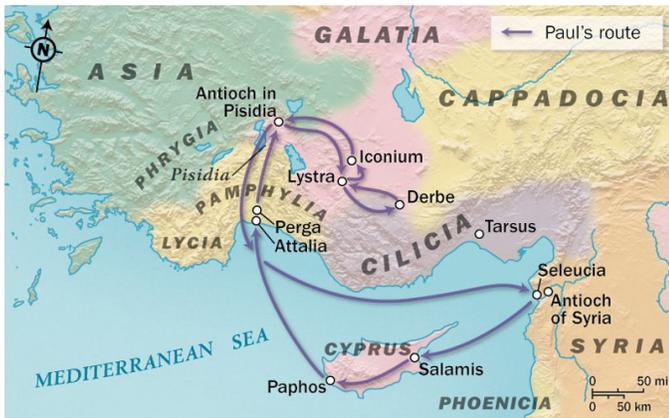
In Acts 28:28 (CLNT), Paul declared to the local Jewish leaders in Rome, “Let it be known to you, that to the nations was dispatched this salvation of God, and they will hear.” Notice the past tense that Paul used here. As André Piet notes, the same grammatical form used in this verse is found in Luke 1:26 (where we read that “the messenger Gabriel was dispatched from God to a city of Galilee...”).

Salvation (or “saving”) being dispatched to the nations was not something that took place after Paul spoke to these Jewish leaders in Rome. By the time of Paul’s imprisonment, salvation had already been dispatched to the nations. Paul’s use of the future tense at the end of the verse (“they will hear”) simply emphasizes the continuation of his ministry to the nations, and refers to those among the nations who had yet to hear the message of salvation that had already been dispatched (and which had been bearing fruit since Paul’s evangel first began to be believed among the nations). In other words, Acts 28:28 points us to both the beginning of Paul’s ministry to the nations, as well as to its continuation. And there is simply no indication in this chapter that the continuation of Paul’s ministry to the nations would involve any change in the identity of the nations of which Paul was made an apostle (and as I’ll be arguing in the next section, neither is there any indication that the nation of Israel underwent any change of status at this time).

But when was this salvation to the nations dispatched? Stephen and I are in agreement that this salvation was not dispatched during Christ’s earthly ministry, or through the ministry of any of the twelve apostles. I also think Stephen and I would agree that the salvation which Paul had in view in Acts 28:28 was dispatched through the instrumentality and ministry of Paul. However, whereas Stephen would say that it was dispatched while Paul was a prisoner in Rome, I think scripture reveals otherwise. Stephen seems to acknowledge that the dispatching of this salvation through Paul’s

ministry was in accordance with Paul's original commission from Christ to be the apostle of the nations (Acts 22:21; 26:16-18; Rom. 11:13). If this is the case, then it is in Acts 13 - not Acts 28 - that we find recorded the point in Paul's ministry when salvation began to be dispatched to the nations (later on in this article I'll be providing evidence that the "nations" referred to at the end of this chapter did not consist exclusively - or even primarily - of proselytized Gentiles, as Stephen claims).

It is in this remarkable chapter that we first read of Paul and Barnabas "turning to the nations" (after boldly declaring to the Jews that they were "thrusting away" the word of life and "judging [themselves] not worthy of eonian life"). It is at this time in Paul's ministry - not during his Roman imprisonment - that the evangel Paul heralded first began to be believed by those among the nations who were "set for life eonian" (vv. 44-48), and the nations began to be justified by faith alone, apart from works (in contrast with the believing Israelites to whom Peter, James and John wrote, concerning whom "faith only" was insufficient for salvation; see James 2:14-26). It is also in Acts 13 that we



“It is Acts 13, then, that should be understood as describing the point in Paul’s ministry when salvation began to be dispatched to those for whom Paul was made an apostle.”

find Paul and his companion Barnabas “severed” to God for the work to which they had been called (Acts 13:1-3). It is in this chapter that we find recorded that intriguing incident involving Sergius Paulus (a Roman proconsul and Gentile) becoming a believer in Christ after Bar-Jesus (a Jewish false prophet) is miraculously blinded and unable to see the sun “until the appointed time” (a miracle which, as a number of students of scripture have noted, seems to

point to the state of affairs involving unbelieving Israel that Paul describes in Romans 11:7-10 and 25-32). And it is in this chapter that Luke ceases to refer to Paul as “Saul” (his Hebrew name), and begins referring to him exclusively as “Paul” (his Roman name).

It is Acts 13, then, that should be understood as describing the point in Paul's ministry when salvation began to be dispatched to those for whom Paul was made an apostle. And despite the claims of Stephen and other Acts 28 proponents, the evidence found in this chapter points to Paul's apostolic ministry as having undergone a transition at this time that is of far greater “dispensational” consequence than anything said to have occurred subsequent to this time.[3] Consequently, when we read the closing words spoken by Paul to the Jewish leaders in Rome, we shouldn't see them as referring to an entirely new ministry that Paul would now be involved in. Rather, what we read in Acts 28:28 should remind the reader of a ministry that had been ongoing ever since “Saul” began to be referred to as “Paul.”

The “Setting Aside of Israel”

In his article, Stephen refers several times to Israel being “set aside” (four times, to be exact). Referring to Israel as having been “set aside” or “placed in abeyance” at the end of the “Acts era” is fairly common among those promoting the Acts 28 theory. Interestingly, neither of these expressions actually appear anywhere in the Greek scriptures. This doesn't, of course, necessarily mean the meaning or concept that these expressions are meant to convey isn't present in scripture. But with regards to words and expressions which are intended to convey something of theological/doctrinal import, we should avoid adopting them unless that which the word or expression is intended to convey has been demonstrated to be clearly taught or revealed in scripture. However, not only does Stephen not demonstrate that Israel was “set aside” (or explain what, exactly, he means by this), he takes for granted that this took place at the end of the “Acts era.” We'll assume that by the “setting aside of Israel” Stephen means that God ceased regarding Israel as an ethnic people and nation having certain covenant privileges or preeminence over all other nations. Assuming this is what Stephen has in mind when he refers to the “setting aside of Israel,” there is simply no evidence that this took place at the end of the period covered by Acts. The Acts 28 theory is based entirely on inference and assumption rather than on a careful consideration of what is actually being said (and not said) in the text.



Paul's quotation of Isaiah 6:9-10 in Acts 28:25-27 is commonly assumed by proponents of the Acts 28 position as having "dispensational significance," and as marking the crisis point when Israel was "set aside" by God. However, there is nothing in the immediate or larger context of the book of Acts that supports this assumption. Paul did not say that anything new was taking place (or had taken place) with regards to Israel as a nation – or with regards to the unbelieving Israelites within the nation - when he quoted from Isaiah. Rather, Paul's quotation of Isaiah 6:9-10 simply re-affirmed what had been true of most Israelites for the entirety of his ministry to the nations up to this point. As such, Paul's words provided further validation of his past and ongoing ministry to the nations. Notice also that Paul declared the words of the prophecy to have been "ideally" spoken by the holy spirit through Isaiah the prophet to the "fathers" of those to whom Paul was speaking; only implicitly, or by extension, can the words be understood as even being applicable to the Jewish leaders in Rome. This being the case, the words of Isaiah could, in the same way, be appropriately applied to every unbelieving Israelite since the time it was spoken "ideally" to the "fathers."

Moreover, this isn't even the first time the prophecy had been quoted since first being spoken through Isaiah. Nearly thirty years before Paul arrived in Rome, Christ had quoted this exact prophecy during his earthly ministry, and declared it to have been "filled up" in all except those few Israelites to whom the "secrets of the kingdom of the heavens" were being given (Matthew 13:10-16). When Christ declared these words as having been "filled up" in his day, the callousness of Israel had, apparently, already reached a crisis point beyond which there would be no national recovery until sometime after the "comple-

ment of the nations" had entered (see Rom. 11:25; I will have more to say about this verse below).

As noted earlier, the expression "setting aside of Israel" appears nowhere in scripture. The only expression that comes close to this was used by Paul in Romans 11:15, where he referred to "their casting away." Who exactly did Paul have in mind here? In Romans 11:7-8 Paul referred to the unbelieving Israelites of his day (who were in the majority) as simply "Israel," and contrasted this collective group with a remnant of Israelites whom he referred to as "the

chosen." The "rest" (the majority of Israelites in Paul's day) are said to have been "calloused" and given "a spirit of stupor, eyes not observing, and ears not to be hearing, till this very day." From the context, it is evident that this calloused condition was one in which an Israelite had been made insensitive and unreceptive to the truth concerning Jesus' identity as the Christ and the Son of God. Paul went on to refer to this calloused, "non-remnant" group of Israelites with the words "they" and "their" in the next verses, all the way to v. 15. Thus, when Paul wrote of "their casting away," he had in view the "casting away" of the majority of Israelites that constituted the nation of Israel in his day (Paul went on to contrast the "casting away" of unbelieving Israel with what he called "the taking back" in the same verse). Thus, by the time Paul wrote to the Romans, the majority of Israelites (being "calloused" and in unbelief) had been "cast away" by God. And what could this mean except that, with regards to covenant privilege and preeminence, the status of an unbelieving Israelite was no better or different than that of an unbelieving, uncircumcised Gentile?

(For the full transcript of Part 2, click here:

http://thathappyexpectation.blogspot.pe/2016/03/acts-28-dispensationalism-revisited_26.html)

PART 3

Stephen makes clear his view of when Paul's ministry began to involve non-proselytized Gentiles (rather than just Greek proselytes). According to Stephen, "The order of progression for Paul's audience throughout his ministry, then, is as follows: The Jews

first, then Greek proselytes, and, lastly, the nations who were previously alienated from Israel's covenant promises." Concerning the identity of the "nations" to whom Paul ministered prior to his imprisonment in Rome, Stephen writes, "By preaching to the Jews and Greek proselytes in the synagogues, then, Paul was indeed heralding Christ to the "nations" (as Greeks are non-Israelites by progeny), although those Greeks were clearly aligning themselves with Israel and were considered, for

be most likely) Ephesians, Colossians and Philemon - and perhaps others - were written while Paul was imprisoned in Caesarea, then no further argumentation from me on this subject would even be necessary. But I'll assume, for the sake of argument, that the dating of Paul's "prison letters" which is presupposed (and required) by the Acts 28 position is correct. After a consideration of the internal evidence found in some of Paul's "pre-imprisonment" letters, I will then turn to scriptural territory that Stephen would

probably consider more favorable to his position: the book of Acts. As we'll see, however, Luke's historical account of Paul's ministry prior to his imprisonment in Rome is even less helpful to the Acts 28 position than are Paul's letters.

The Nations in the Body of Christ before Paul's Roman Imprisonment

A careful look at some of the things Paul says in the letters that Stephen would agree were written before his imprisonment in Rome indicates that the ecclesias to which Paul wrote consisted, at least partially, of Gentiles who had come from a pagan, idol-worshipping background (rather than

consisting exclusively of Jews and Greek proselytes, as Stephen's position requires). Before we look at this evidence, let's first consider some things Paul wrote in his letter to the saints in Rome. In Romans 1:5-6, Paul wrote that he had obtained his apostleship "for faith-obedience among all the nations, for His name's sake, among whom are you also..." It is evident from this verse that many of the saints in Rome to whom Paul wrote this letter - perhaps even the majority in the ecclesia - were not Jewish, but rather had a Gentile (uncircumcised) background. Paul went on to express his purpose to visit Rome, that he "should be having some fruit among [them] also, according as among the rest of the nations," and then referred to himself as a debtor to "both Greeks and barbarians, to both wise and foolish" (vv. 13-14).

Now, did Paul have in view only proselytized Gentiles when he referred to "all the nations" and "the rest of the nations" in these verses? Are we to believe that Paul considered himself a debtor only to Greeks and barbarians who were proselytes of Israel - those who were (as Stephen says concerning proselytes) "for all intents and purposes, Jewish?" Or did Paul have in mind those among the nations, in general (whether proselytized or not)? I believe



all intents and purposes, 'Jewish.'" And concerning Paul's being the "apostle to the nations" prior to his imprisonment, Stephen writes, "Paul retained his title all along, but he could not enact all that his title entailed until God permitted him to, after the full setting aside of Israel." Thus, according to Stephen's position, the nations to whom Paul heralded his "evangel of the uncircumcision" prior to his imprisonment in Rome were merely Greek proselytes, and the reason Paul's imprisonment in Rome was such a pivotal moment in his ministry is because it was at this time that he was able to "enact all that his title entailed" by heralding his evangel to non-proselytized Gentiles - i.e., Gentiles who weren't "for all intents and purposes, 'Jewish.'"

In response to Stephen's position concerning the "nations" to whom Paul heralded Christ before his imprisonment in Rome, I will first be looking at the internal evidence of those letters that Stephen would agree were written before his Roman imprisonment. However, as I argued earlier, proponents of the Acts 28 position could very well be mistaken about which (if any) of Paul's "prison letters" were actually written while Paul was under house arrest in Rome. If (as I believe to

it is the latter, and that there are indicators in his other pre-prison letters which support this.

In Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians (which Stephen would likely say was one of Paul's earliest letters), we find that those to whom he wrote were Gentiles who had, after hearing and believing Paul's evangel, turned from worshipping idols to the worship of the "living and true God" (1 Thess. 1:9). Similarly, in his letter to the Galatians, it would seem that many, if not most, of the members of this ecclesia were not only uncircumcised Gentiles, but converts from paganism (Gal. 4:8). With regards to Paul's letters to the Corinthians, we know that, although there was a small community in Corinth composed of Jews who had been exiled from Rome, the predominant religious culture in Corinth was Greek/pagan, and consisted of the worship of various gods and goddesses. Paul alluded to this pagan cultural aspect of Corinth in 1 Corinthians 8, which concerns



idol sacrifices (v. 1). Why would Paul have to address this issue if the ecclesia was composed exclusively of those from a Jewish and proselyte background? In verse 7, Paul wrote: "Now some, used hitherto to the idol, are eating of it as an idol sacrifice, and their conscience, being weak, is being polluted." The word translated "used" (or "accustomed") here literally means "together-custom," and indicates that eating idol sacrifices had been, for some in the ecclesia to

which Paul wrote, a habitual cultural practice – something that would only make sense if some or all of the Gentile members of this ecclesia were (like those in Thessalonica and likely Galatia) former idol-worshippers.

Moreover, what Paul wrote in 1 Cor. 10:1 presupposes that some of the members in this ecclesia were not even familiar with the basics of Israelite history. It would be absurd to think that any Jew (or even Gentile proselyte) could possibly be "ignorant" of the things of which Paul wrote in 1 Cor. 10:1-4, and yet Paul declared, "I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren..."[1] As with his words in chapter 8 concerning idol sacrifices, this would only make sense if Paul was addressing Gentiles within the ecclesia who, prior to believing his evangel and becoming members of the ecclesia in Corinth, were idol-worshipping pagans. Similarly, Paul's words in the rest of this chapter (see especially verses 14-22) seem to presuppose that some in the ecclesia may have been tempted or pressured to return to their former idolatrous practices (which would involve "partaking of the table of demons"). Interestingly, the next time Paul used the words "I do not want you to be ignorant," he immediately added, "You are aware that when you were of the nations, you were led away to the voiceless idols, as ever you were led" (1 Cor. 12:2; Young's translates this verse as follows: "...ye have known that ye were nations, unto dumb idols—as ye were led—being carried away").

As quoted earlier, Stephen has claimed that Paul "could not enact all that his title entailed until God permitted him to, after the full setting aside of Israel." In other words, although Paul was commissioned to be the apostle to the nations, his ministry did not involve heralding Christ to non-proselytized Gentiles until after he was imprisoned in Rome; until this time, his ministry was focused on Jews and Greek proselytes (Gentiles who were, as Stephen says, "for all intents and purposes, Jewish"). However, the above evidence from Paul's "early letters" is simply not consistent with Stephen's claim. Instead, we see that Paul was, in fact, "enacting all that his title entailed" long before his imprisonment in Rome. Although it is undoubtedly true that there were some in the ecclesias that Paul helped establish prior to his Roman imprisonment who had a Jewish and/or proselyte background, it is equally true that there were others who did not have such a background before believing Paul's evangel - and depending on the size and location of the ecclesia, those who were previously worshipping idols could've very well been in the majority. But regardless of the ratio of Jew/Greek proselyte to non-proselytized Gentiles in any given ecclesia, the inclusion of any

non-proselytized Gentiles in these ecclesias undermines Stephen's theory.

(For the full transcript of Part 3, click here:

http://thathappyexpectation.blogspot.pe/2016/03/acts-28-dispensationalism-revisited_52.html)

PART 4

As evidence for his position, Stephen claims that there are things said by Paul in his “pre-prison” letters that are not as relevant or applicable to the body of Christ today as they were when Paul wrote to the saints at that time. The examples he gives are repentance, the Lord’s Dinner and the spiritual gifts (e.g., speaking in tongues, performing miracles, healing and prophesying). Stephen writes: “Consider this: if we neglect to rightly divide Paul’s epistles, we have no choice but to partake in the Lord’s Dinner, seek the spiritual gifts, attempt to heal others, and so forth. Paul instructed his early readers (especially the Corinthians) to do all these things, declaring that Christ had passed them along to him. If Paul’s letters are all equally relevant for us today, then either those ordinances are still valid, or Paul contradicts himself.”

The Spiritual Gifts

According to Stephen, partaking in the Lord’s Dinner, seeking the spiritual gifts, attempting to heal and prophesying are all “ordinances in keeping with the Israeli program.” In “The Status of the Body of Christ Prior to Acts 28:28,” I argued that the presence and exercise of spiritual gifts (e.g., speaking in tongues, healing, prophesying) at the time when Paul wrote to the Corinthians need not be understood as suggesting that Paul’s ministry at this time was in accord with an “Israeli program.” There is simply no need to divide up Paul’s letters into two distinct “dispensational” categories in order to understand why the spiritual gifts were in operation at that time, but aren’t today. It was because of the unique circumstances in that day that the spiritual gifts were present within the body of Christ when Paul wrote to the Corinthians.

One of the reasons for their manifestation had to do with the validation of Paul’s apostleship as the apostle of the nations (see 2 Cor. 12:11-13; cf. 13:1-3). In Romans 15:18-19, Paul referred to the “signs and wonders” he performed in validation of his apostleship as being “for the obedience of the nations” (not “of Israel” or even “of

Greek proselytes”), and - as noted earlier - these signs and wonders had been manifested from the beginning of his ministry to the nations (Acts 15:12). They were never meant to have a permanent place in the administration of the grace of God, but continued to be manifested only for as long as God deemed it necessary. When their manifestation ceased (or began to cease), Paul’s instructions to the saints regarding them ceased to be directly applicable. But again, their ceasing had nothing to do with Israel, or with the ending of one administration and the beginning of a new one.

With regards to the issue of applicability and relevance, something that needs to be kept in mind is that none of Paul’s letters – whether they were written during the “Acts era” or afterwards – were written directly to anyone alive today. No one alive today was among the original recipients of Paul’s letters. This is not to deny that what Paul wrote to the saints in the body of Christ in the first century is more relevant, applicable and useful to believers today than (for example) James’ letter to the twelve tribes scattered abroad. But it does



mean that there are some things said by Paul that are less relevant and applicable to the saints today than they were to the saints that Paul had in mind when he wrote his letters – and this, again, is true regardless of when the letters were written.

Paul’s instructions regarding the use of the spiritual gifts that were present within the body of Christ when Paul wrote to the Corinthians isn’t the only example of Paul exhorting or entreating the original recipients of his letters to do things which a subsequent change in circumstances (circumstances which had nothing to do with a change in administrations) rendered inapplicable and no longer directly relevant to those reading

his letters. Consider, for example, Paul's request in Ephesians 6:18-20, as well as his subsequent remarks in verses 21-22. It would be absurd to argue that, because what Paul wrote in these verses is not directly applicable or relevant to those reading today, it must be because we live in a different administration or dispensation! The fact is simply that a change in circumstances which had nothing to do with the administration we're under caused this part of Paul's letter to lose its direct relevance and applicability to those reading. I'm not, of course, saying that these words of Paul are entirely without applicability, or that they have no benefit for us; I'm simply pointing out what should be obvious: not everything that Paul wrote (whether in his "pre-prison letters" or "prison letters") directly pertains to us, or to every possible saint whom Paul believed may read his letters. Even for those saints who were among the first to read or hear what Paul wrote in Ephesians, the last few verses ceased to have the same relevance and applicability that they originally had when the circumstances that made it necessary for Paul to write what he did changed.

Consider also Phil. 2:25-30, noting especially Paul's appeal to the recipients of his letter to "receive him [Epaphroditus]." Can Stephen or any other saints besides those to whom Paul wrote this letter do what Paul requested? No. What about Paul's further entreatment in Phil. 4:2-3? Again, the answer is no. Or how about what Paul wrote in Colossians 4:2-4, 7-10 and 15-17? Can the saints today do what Paul exhorted the original recipients of this letter to do in these verses? If not, does it mean we exist in a different administration? Or does it simply mean that the circumstances of those to whom Paul originally wrote and our own circumstances are such that what Paul wrote in these verses simply doesn't directly pertain to us? Obviously, it's the latter. These are not, of course, the only examples of things that Paul wrote in his letters which, although not directly applicable to us today, Paul nonetheless included in his letters because of the circumstances at that time. But these examples should, hopefully, suffice.

Repentance: It's Not Just For Jews

According to Stephen, "Repentance is another important distinguisher between Paul's earlier and later epistles." Stephen then adds, "Paul's message in his earlier epistles contained a call to repentance, whereas his latter epistles stressed justification through faith." The sentence I underlined is perhaps the most perplexing and head-scratching statement Stephen makes in his entire article. So off-base is this statement that I actually thought I'd misread what

Stephen wrote immediately after reading it. The most glaring problem with this assertion is the idea that Paul's "latter epistles stressed justification through faith," whereas his earlier epistles didn't. Stephen must have been sleep-deprived when he wrote that. Even a cursory reading of Paul's letters makes it clear that Paul spoke of justification by faith far more frequently in his "earlier letters" than in any of the letters he wrote while in prison (or after he was imprisoned). In fact, by my count the words "justification," "justify" or "justified" appear in Paul's "earlier epistles" (Galatians, 1 Corinthians and Romans) at least 15 times. Contrast this with the number of times that any of these words appear in his "latter epistles": the word "justified" appears only once, in Titus 3:7. To this fact Stephen may reply, "Yes, but that doesn't mean the truth of justification isn't implied in Paul's other 'prison epistles'; just because a certain term isn't explicitly used by Paul doesn't mean the idea or concept isn't present." Agreed, but as we'll see below, the same could be said concerning the truth of repentance.

Stephen seems to think that repenting and being justified by faith are somehow mutually exclusive – as if one cannot be justified and also be in need of "repenting" of something. But when we understand what "repentance" is, it should be obvious that this is simply not the case. The Greek noun *metanoia* (usually translated "repentance") simply means "a change of mind about something or someone"; similarly, its cognate verb *metanoeo* ("repent") simply means "to change one's mind about something or



"Carol wants to know whether I repented or I'm justified."

someone." There is ample evidence in the New Testament, the Septuagint (LXX) and in extra-biblical Greek literature that supports this understanding of the words. The words, by themselves, are completely neutral with regards to that about which one is changing one's mind (or not), or about which one is being called to change one's mind (and

that includes the action that is expected to follow from the change of mind). Only the context in which the words are found can inform us of this.

Although *metanoia* and *metanoeo* were certainly used in reference to the need of an Israelite to think (and then act) differently with regards to both their individual sins as well as their national unbelief/rejection of Christ, the words have nothing inherently to do with Israel, the Mosaic Law or an Israelite's view of Christ. For example, Paul declared to the pagan (non-proselytized) Gentiles in Athens that "God is now charging mankind that all everywhere are to repent (*metanoeo*), forasmuch as He assigns a day in which He is about to be judging the inhabited earth in righteousness by the Man Whom He specifies, tendering faith to all, raising Him from among the dead-" (Acts 17:30-31). In the context, the "repentance" (or change of mind) in view involves turning away from the worship of false gods/idols and worshipping the one true God (as he has revealed himself in "the man whom he specifies," Christ Jesus).

Again, to repent is simply to change one's mind about something or someone (which, depending on what one is changing one's mind about, will result in changed behavior). Our being justified – i.e., our being declared (or reckoned) righteous by God – does not put us beyond the need to change our mind with regards to some erroneous belief(s) we may have, or concerning some unloving, sinful behavior(s) we may be engaged in. It does not put us beyond the need to think differently about something and then to begin to act differently. The saints in Corinth to whom Paul wrote had been "justified in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ and by the spirit of our God" (1 Cor. 6:11) and thus become "God's righteousness in Christ" (2 Cor. 5:21). As such, they were "new creations" (v. 17). And yet, Paul did not hesitate to rebuke them for certain sinful and immature behavior they were engaged in, and to exhort them to think and act differently. We find this throughout his first letter to them. Interestingly, however, Paul never explicitly tells the Corinthian believers to "repent" of what they were doing in his first letter. And yet, whenever he rebuked them or exhorted them to think or act differently, their need for repentance (to change their mind) was implied. That this is the case is evident from the fact that Paul spoke of their response to his first letter as appropriately involving repentance (2 Cor. 7:9-10). Although Paul seemed satisfied with how some of the saints had responded to the rebukes and exhortations of his first letter, there were still others within the ecclesia who remained in need of "repenting of the uncleanness and

prostitution and wantonness" which they were committing (2 Cor. 12:21). Did this mean that, while they were in need of repentance, they weren't justified by faith? No; of course not. Their eonian life "in the heavens" was just as secure as when they first believed and received the "earnest of the spirit" (2 Cor. 5:1-5). But their justification (and eonian expectation) notwithstanding, they were still "minors in Christ," and greatly lacking in maturity (1 Cor. 3:1-4).

Because a need for repentance was implied whenever Paul exhorted the Corinthian saints to think and behave differently than how they were behaving (again, Paul never explicitly mentioned repentance in his first letter to them), it can be reasonably concluded that a need for repentance was equally implied elsewhere in his letters whenever he exhorted the saints of other ecclesias to not behave in a certain way or do certain things. For example, Paul's exhortations in Ephesians 4:17-32 (such as, "Let him who steals by no means still be stealing; yet rather let him be toiling, working with his hands at what is good, that he may have to share with one who has need") imply a need for repentance for any of the saints who may have been engaged in such sinful behavior, rather than walking worthily of the calling with which they had been called (Eph. 4:1). If someone was stealing or engaged in prostitution (for example), then such behavior was something of which they were in need of repenting (i.e., changing their mind about). But again, a need for a believer to repent (to think and act differently than how they're thinking and acting) does not imply that one isn't justified, or that one is in any danger of losing one's eonian life. —*Aaron Welch*

(For the full transcript of Part 4, click here:

http://thathappyexpectation.blogspot.pe/2016/03/acts-28-dispensationalism-revisited_72.html)

