

Last Day Messenger

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**"Woe to the multitude of many people, which make a noise like the noise of the seas; and to the rushing of nations, that make a rushing like the rushing of mighty waters!"
(Isaiah 17:12).**

Things that Differ -- In God's Plan of the Ages

Paul's Two Sets of Epistles

The Reason for the Pentecostal Gifts in Paul's Early Epistles

By Dee L. McCroskey

I WELL remember an incident that occurred a few months after I received the Lord as my Saviour. A few of us were giving out tracts in a city park. A well dressed man stopped and began asking me some strange questions. He asked me if I had "the baptism of the Holy Ghost;" did I speak in tongues, and did I have the gift of healing? He quoted several Scriptures for these things, mostly in the Gospels and in the Book of Acts.

I replied that such things were Jewish signs, because "the Jews require a sign" (I Cor. 1:22), but that we are now in the age of grace, and all these things are no longer in order. I told him we must "rightly divide" the Word, as we are told in II Timothy 2:15, and that we must go to Paul's Epistles for the things that are for us today. Whereupon the man borrowed my Bible and showed me,

in I Cor. 12:9-10, that tongues and healings ARE in Paul's Epistles! Paul even commands to "forbid not to speak with tongues" (I Cor. 14:39). Fortunately for me, it was time for us to leave, and my brethren were already calling me.

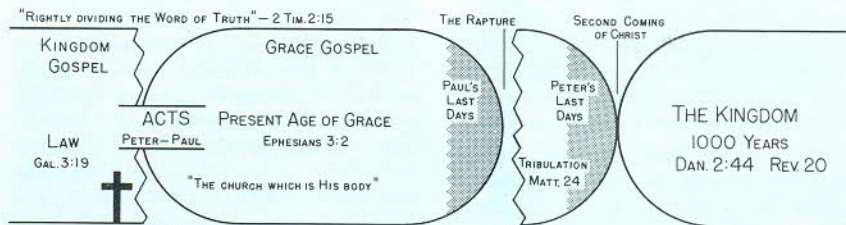
I knew the man had missed something, but at that time I could not explain the presence of the miraculous gifts in the Pauline Epistles. Another such gift was "prophesying" (I Cor. 12:10), which was to disappear later. But in that day, Paul commanded, "Despise not prophesyings" (I Thess. 5:20).

The Word itself, in this same Epistle of First Corinthians, foretold that some of these sign gifts would cease. "Whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease" (I Cor. 13:8). At some time after this Epistle was written, these sign gifts DID cease, and go off the scene. But it still leaves us with the big question: WHEN did this happen, and WHY did it happen?

Paul's Two Sets of Epistles

We must remember that Paul was not one of the twelve Jewish Apostles, whose destiny is to sit on the twelve thrones during the

Note—This article is similar to one we published in 1960, and reprinted in tract form, entitled "Rightly Dividing Paul's Epistles." This tract is still available at Gospel Tract Distributors, a few copies free upon request.



Kingdom age, and rule over the twelve tribes of Israel (Matthew 19:28). Paul was a special Apostle, the Apostle to the Gentiles, and he was God's instrument to bring forth a brand new set of revelations, revealing the Mystery which God had kept secret during past ages—the Church which is the one body. He wrote 13 Epistles, not counting the Epistle to the Hebrews.

Of these 13 Epistles, the first six are in a group by themselves, and they have a certain distinctive ministry. These two groups of Epistles are divided by a certain distinct event, and this is the answer to our problem of the signs and miracles in the Pauline Epistles. If any child of God today will permit himself to escape the chains of tradition and prejudice, and see this wonderful truth, what new heights of joy he will find in God's Word!

During the Acts period Paul wrote this first group of six Epistles. We call them the "PRE-PRISON" Epistles. They are, in their approximate order: I and II Thessalonians, I and II Corinthians, Galatians and Romans. The Old

Scofield Bible places the dates of writing of this group between A.D. 54 and 60. The New Scofield places both dates a little earlier.

The second group of seven Epistles was written at the CLOSE of the Acts period, while Paul was in prison at Rome. (See Scofield note on Acts 28:30). We call these the "PRISON" Epistles. They are: Philemon, Colossians, Ephesians, Philippians, I Timothy, Titus and II Timothy. The dates of writing are placed at about A.D. 64 to 66.

Some of the Differences

Six is the number of man and human weakness, and in the first group we see the human side of the Church—greed, carnality, worldliness, disorderliness, and even fornication. But in the second group of seven, we see God's completeness—"complete in Him" (Col. 2:10)—our standing in Christ and our heavenly calling in Him.

Note this list of ministry gifts from the Holy Spirit in the Pre-prison Epistles, in I Cor. 12:8-10—wisdom, knowledge, faith, gifts of healing, working of miracles, prophecy, discerning of spirits, tongues and interpretation of tongues. Compare it with the list

in Eph. 4:11—apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers. Notice how many Acts period gifts have been dropped by the time we get to the Prison Epistles. All the miracle gifts have been dropped.

Note that Paul himself healed people during the Acts period—Acts 14:10 and 19:11-12. But we find no mention of any healings at all in the Prison Epistles. A fellow worker had to be left at home sick—II Tim. 4:20, and Paul had to give Timothy a medical prescription—I Tim. 5:23.

A Climactic Decade

Whenever there is a significant change in God's order of things, there is always some definite event to mark the change and make it known. We call this a "crisis." The flood was a crisis. So was the crucifixion of our Lord. The rapture will be a crisis. Was there a crisis of some kind during the early days of the Church? Yes, there had to be. For God's order of things definitely DID change, and certain sign gifts DID cease, as was prophesied. Looking at the long period from Pentecost to the rapture, was there some significant event, a crisis, to mark a change in God's present program? Yes, there was one. That was the historic event in A.D. 70, together with the events leading up to it as recorded in the latter chapters of Acts.

This was a climactic decade, from about A.D. 60 to 70. Israel, the chosen nation, steadfastly refused to heed God's offer to them. The crisis reached its climax in Acts 28:25-28. The Holy Spirit,

speaking through Paul, pronounced the solemn indictment of Isaiah 6:9-10 upon the nation, that "the heart of this people is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes have they closed." Then Paul said, "Be it known therefore unto you, that the salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles, and that they will hear it." This was the end of the line for the nation Israel; the nation was thus set aside until after the church is taken out (Romans 11:25).

The prophesied crisis came to its bloody and terrible consummation in A.D. 70. The temple and the city of Jerusalem were destroyed, and the Jews were scattered over the face of the earth, not to be regathered as a nation until the end of the present age, as we are beginning to see it today.

Why the Order Changed

Very sadly, many precious believers today are like Israel to some extent, in that "their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes have they closed" regarding this change in God's order of things. Traditions from the past, and blinding prejudice, these are two formidable enemies, always lurking in our hearts to keep us from going forward with God!

But for the truly Berean heart (Acts 17:11), the significance of Paul's two sets of Epistles now unfolds itself. During the Acts period, although God was turning more and more to the Gentiles, and the Church was already on the scene, He was still dealing with the nation Israel. He had not yet com-

pletely set aside the chosen nation, not till Acts 28:28. We can only marvel at the patience and long-suffering of God toward the rebellious nation. As the inspired Apostle said to them, "It was necessary that the Word of God should first have been spoken to you: but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles" (Acts 13:46).

And so long as God was still dealing with Israel, certain Kingdom signs were still in order. Take the gift of healing. Think what it would be like today if this gift were still here; if certain men here and there had the gift to heal whoever they laid their hands upon. Hospitals would soon go out of business, and there would be little need of doctors and nurses. And that is exactly the way it will be in the millennial Kingdom, when the "Sun of righteousness" shall arise "with healing in His wings" (Mal. 4:2)."

Acts 28:28 was the turning point. With the setting aside of the chosen nation, there was no longer a need for these Kingdom signs, and they ceased. And here is where the Prison Epistles come in, which Paul wrote AFTER Acts 28:28, and in these Prison Epistles you find no more tongues, healings or other sign gifts. They have passed off the scene until after the rapture.

We are not saying that God no longer heals people. If it be His will, He can, and often does, hear our prayers for an afflicted loved one. But we should not forget to say, "If it be Thy will." If so, God

will do it directly, without being obligated by a promise to do so, and without the instrumentality of another person with a gift of healing. It is the "gift" that has ceased.

And one other word of caution: let us be wary of extremism. As with so many good things, there are extremists. We have pointed out that certain Jewish things went off the scene after the Pre-prison Epistles were written. There are extremists who say that *everything* in the Pre-prison Epistles went off the scene and only the Prison Epistles are for today. Thus they say that the Lord's supper passed off the scene, and some go so far as to say that the rapture is also not the hope for us today. (However, it seems to me that Philippians 3:20-21 takes care of this claim!)

A Rule to Learn Well

How can we tell what things ended at the close of the Acts period, and what things continue on through the Prison Epistles to the end of this age? There is a simple rule. Let us write it down and learn it well. It is this:

Everything that came in by Paul's revelations from the Lord, these things continue on to the rapture. But certain things that were already here when Paul arrived on the scene, things that were Jewish and pertained to the Kingdom program, these were discontinued at the close of the Acts period.

For instance, there is the Lord's supper in I Corinthians 11. Paul says, as clear as words can make it, "I have received of the Lord

that which I delivered unto you" (I Cor. 11:23). It is true that Paul quotes the direct words of the Lord Jesus in verses 24 and 25, words that He spoke before His crucifixion, but then, from verse 26 on, we have Paul's words, found nowhere else in the Bible, and received directly from the risen Lord. So this is Pauline, and continues on, "showing the Lord's death till He come."

But signs, miracles, healings, tongues and even water baptism, were already here when Paul arrived on the scene. They had to do with the earthly program for the nation Israel, and they passed off the scene and gave way to the complete revelation of God's heavenly program for the Church, in the Prison Epistles. But let us value just as highly the great Pauline truths of the Pre-prison Epistles, such as assembly ground, and the personal faith and walk of the believer. From one of these Epistles we have this stirring call to victory:

"Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord" (I Cor. 15:58). □



As God's children we should look to His leading (halting when He calls a halt, and moving when He bids us go), even though we do not understand the direction He is leading.—*Selected.*



"If you were arrested for being a Christian, could they find enough evidence to convict you?"—Sel.