

# Acts 28 – A Dispensation Too Far

## Introduction

I was saved in 2006 when I ceased arguing with a mid-Acts dispensational preacher and acknowledged in my mind (not out loud) that the apostle Paul had indeed met the Lord Jesus Christ – the risen and glorified Jesus Christ, according to the mid-Acts preacher. Sadly, that preacher has since become convinced that Acts 28 dispensationalism is more correct than mid-Acts dispensationalism. I believe that mid-Acts at its best is a good dispensation but that Acts 28 is a dispensation too far.

I have become familiar with some of the teachings of Acts 28 dispensationalism and have come to see that the basic thrust of all Acts 28 teaching is:

- 1) to disconnect the current predominantly Gentile body of Christ from everything to do with Israel and to ‘rightly’ divide and eliminate all traces of Israel from Paul’s epistles written during the years covered by the book of Acts, prior to his imprisonment in Rome
- 2) to proclaim an array of changes of Christian doctrine, supposedly declared exclusively in Paul’s prison epistles (called prison epistles because they were written during Paul’s imprisonment in Rome).

I will attempt to keep this critique as simple as possible and so will not pick on each and every teaching of Acts 28ers but rather will attempt to deal to the basis of Acts 28 doctrine.

## What happened in Acts 28?

Paul’s Acts 28 decision to cease trying to persuade the nation Israel to come on board with Christian teachings, was just and only that. He decided to stop trying to convince the nation Israel to come on board.

*“Be it known therefore unto you, that the salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles, and that they will hear it. And when he had said these words, the Jews departed, and had great reasoning among themselves.” (Acts 28:28-29 AV)*

Paul did not decide to separate the body of Christ from all things Jewish. Nor did Paul ever suggest, in any of his prison epistles, that his older Acts period epistles needed to be “rightly divided” to eliminate all things Jewish.

## Ephesians 2:11-13

Acts 28 dispensationalism doctrine is dependent on an inversion of the logic of Paul's comments in Ephesians 2:11-13.

*"Wherefore remember, that ye being in time past Gentiles in the flesh, who are called Uncircumcision by that which is called the Circumcision in the flesh made by hands; That at that time ye **were** without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world: **But now** in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are **made nigh** by the blood of Christ. (Ephesians 2:11-13 AV)*

Are **MADE NIGH** to what? Are made nigh to the commonwealth of Israel and the covenants of promise.

One of the Acts 28 teachers, Tom Ballinger, in his article "One New Man", has inverted the message of Ephesians 2:12-13. He says that Paul was declaring that the Acts 28ers "body of the prison epistles" **ARE** currently aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and **ARE** currently strangers from the covenants of promise.

Here is the correct understanding of these verses:

We (believing Gentiles) **WERE** once aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, but now by the blood of Christ **WE ARE NO LONGER ALIENS FROM THE COMMONWEALTH OF ISRAEL.**

We (believing Gentiles) **WERE** once strangers from the covenants of promise, but now by the blood of Christ **WE ARE NO LONGER STRANGERS FROM THE COVENANTS OF PROMISE.**

I understand the attraction of being distanced from Israel rather than being made nigh, particularly in the light of the nation Israel's current (2025) behaviour in Gaza. But I am glad to be made nigh to Israel's heroes of faith in times past. And I am glad to be made nigh to Israel's covenants of promise.

## Goodbye to the father of our faith?

In the same article, "One New Man", Tom uses his inversion of the logic of Ephesians 2:12-13 to enable his declaration that his "body of the prison epistles" is cleansed of the father of our faith, Abraham. It is true that Paul does not mention Abraham in any of his prison epistles, but this would be because he was no longer trying to bring the nation of

Israel on board. Most of the Gentile audience of his prison epistles would have never heard of Abraham. But Abraham remains a major part of the commonwealth of Israel to which we Gentile believers have been made nigh by the blood of Jesus and to which we are no longer aliens.

## Christ's relationship to the Church

"For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us; Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain **one new man**, so making peace;" (Ephesians 2:14-15 AV)

Tom uses Ephesians 2:15 to change the relationship of Christ to the church. According to Tom, his "body of the prison epistles" is **MASCULINE** because, in a prison epistle, Paul used the term "one new **MAN**" to describe Christ's merging of God's new Gentile faithful with the Jewish faithful. In the context I reckon that Paul was using the word 'man' in a general sense, as modern writers might speak of the "age of man" to mean the age of both men and women. I suggest that it was not Paul's intention for the use of the descriptive term "one new man" to radically change the spiritual gender of the church and its relationship to Christ because he declares the mystery of that relationship later in the **same prison epistle**: in Ephesians 5:31-32.

"For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh. This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church." (Ephesians 5:31-32 AV)

If the church is now masculine (as Tom declares) and we can agree that Christ is also masculine, then the marriage of Christ and the church would be illustrated by the joining of two males. Surely the joining of a male to a female is a much better illustration.

## Israel's connection to my (and your) salvation

When I was saved, I knew immediately that a new presence had come into my consciousness. I was saved when I came to truly believe that Paul had met the risen and glorified Christ. I believed that God had raised the Lord Jesus from the dead.

"That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved."  
(Romans 10:9 AV)

Paul also explained to me what or who this new presence was: the Spirit.

"This only would I learn of you, Received ye **the Spirit** by the works of the law, or by **the hearing of faith**? Are ye so foolish? having begun in the **Spirit**, are ye now made perfect by the flesh? Have ye suffered so many things in vain? if it be yet in vain. He therefore that ministereth to you the **Spirit**, and worketh miracles among you, doeth he it by the works of the law, or by **the hearing of faith**?" (Galatians 3:2-5 AV)

In his epistle to the Ephesians (the Acts 28ers favourite epistle), he explained further who this Spirit was.

"In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that **holy Spirit of promise**," (Ephesians 1:13 AV)

The holy Spirit of promise. So, to whom was this holy Spirit first promised?

"And, behold, I send the **promise of my Father** upon you: but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high." (Luke 24:49 AV)

"And, being assembled together with them, commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the **promise of the Father**, which, saith he, ye have heard of me." (Acts 1:4 AV)

"Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father **the promise of the Holy Ghost**, he hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear." (Acts 2:33 AV)

So, we Gentiles in the 21<sup>st</sup> century are still receiving the promise of the Father, the promise of the Holy Ghost, the holy Spirit of promise, which was first promised to Israel.

"It hath pleased them verily; and their debtors they are. For if the *Gentiles* have been made **partakers of their spiritual things**, their duty is also to minister unto them in carnal things." (Romans 15:27 AV)

Luke's "promise of the Father" and "promise of the Holy Ghost" are both referring to the **SAME** promise which Paul (in a prison epistle) called the holy Spirit of promise.