

Did the Body of Christ begin at ACTS 28?

INTRODUCTION

While we are in disagreement with those holding the doctrine commonly referred to as the "Acts 28 view," we hold no animosity against them. They are fellow members of the Body of Christ and respected students of the Word of God. On many issues we are in agreement with them. While some areas of possible disagreement are of minor importance, one's view on this teaching does have far reaching implications in important areas of doctrine and practice. The proposition addressed in this paper is whether or not a vital and important dispensational change took place upon Paul's arrival in Rome, or shortly thereafter.

It is not denied that there are problems in the understanding of Paul's total ministry. Its relation to the ministry of the twelve, the harmony between his early and later epistles, and the exact content of his final message and program, have challenged Bible students for generations. It is not intended that this article should solve all of these problems. The question is whether or not the Acts 28 view is a scripturally admissible and defensible basis for arriving at such answers.

Our prayer is that, in spite of strong convictions on both sides, there may be more light than heat developed by the discussion.

PAUL'S ARRIVAL IN ROME.

According to the "Acts 28 people" a great dispensational change took place when Paul arrived in Rome and made his declaration, "Be it known therefore unto you, that the salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles, and that they will hear it" (Acts 28:28). According to them this change included the following details:

- The very beginning of the "Dispensation of the Grace of God" (Eph. 3:2), the "Fellowship of the Mystery" (Eph. 3:9), took place at this time.
- Paul's "kingdom ministry," as they refer to it, was concluded and a new ministry, based on the revelation of the Mystery, began.
- A new message and program were initiated.
- The "Joint-Body," a different Body than that in Romans and First Corinthians, began.
- A new "hope" (not including the "Rapture of the church" which we think of as our "blessed hope") was initiated. This new hope is said to be a "heavenly hope" rather than an earthly one.
- The epistles written before the end of the book of Acts are now no longer applicable directly to us, being, as they teach, related to the "kingdom program" that Paul, together with the other apostles, was preaching. Only the epistles written after Paul's arrival in Rome are

specifically to and about us. The earlier ones are to be handled much as we would an Old Testament passage or the Gospel records. That is, they are for us but not to us.

-- The Lord's Table is no longer for us, being, they say, a kingdom ordinance.

-- We now have no relationship whatsoever to Abraham, the Old Covenant, the New Covenant, etc.

There are many details not listed here which will appear in the following pages, but this should suffice to make us aware of just how far reaching the dispensational change is that we are told took place at Acts 28:28.

THE DISPENSATIONAL BOUNDARY

If such a radical change actually took place when Paul reached Rome we have every right to expect he will plainly tell us so in the letters he wrote from there. Of course he would not refer to "Acts 28," or even to the book of Acts, for that book was not written until at least two years after Paul arrived at Rome (Acts 28:30). There are, however, references to his imprisonment, his chain, his arrival in Rome, etc., in Acts and the Prison Epistles. Let us look at these passages and see if Paul links this event with a great dispensational change.

-- **In Acts 28:20** Paul, having just arrived in Rome, tells the Jews there, "-- for the hope of Israel I am bound with this chain." The chain he speaks of was one he had already been wearing for over two years (Acts 24:27), ever since he had been taken as a prisoner in Jerusalem (Acts 21:33). What did he mean when he spoke of the "hope of Israel"? Let us look at the circumstances of his imprisonment to find the answer. Shortly after he was put in chains he was given the opportunity to make a formal speech to the council convened in Jerusalem (Acts 23:1 -- "council" is "Sanhedrin" in NASB margin). He told them, "-- of the hope and resurrection of the dead I am called in question" (Acts 23:6). Resurrection is a hope of all believers of all ages, but it was specifically mentioned as the "hope of Israel" here. Speaking in Rome later he makes the same claim, "-- for the hope of Israel [resurrection] I am bound with this chain" (Acts 28:20). He was saying, in effect, "Why are you angry with me for preaching the risen Christ? The resurrection of the dead is one of your own major teachings in Israel."

-- **In Acts 28:30, 31** reference is made to the two years immediately following the commencement of his Roman imprisonment, during which most scholars believe he wrote Ephesians, Colossians, Philippians and Philemon. His ministry, during this time, is summarized for us by Luke. He makes no reference to a new revelation, a new program, a new dispensation or a new hope. Instead the words are, "And Paul dwelt two whole years in his own house, and received all that came in unto him, preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ, with all confidence, no man forbidding him." There was no need for Paul to veil his teaching, or for Luke to keep it hidden, for he was able to teach with full confidence. No one was trying to censor (or censure) his ministry. Is the whole point of the book of Acts, for US, the change in dispensation, message, and program which the events of the book have been leading up to? Is the pronouncement of Acts 28:28 the great crisis and turning point of the book? Then why, **WHY**, are two whole years of ministry -- ministry so

important that (according to them) it changed everything for the believers -- described in words that give **NO HINT** of such a change? Luke had direct personal knowledge of that ministry, the Acts 28 brethren do not! His words leave ample room for Paul continuing and amplifying what he had taught before (how very much the teachings in Ephesians and Colossians "concern the Lord Jesus Christ"!). However they give not even a hint of a disruption of his former program or the adoption of a completely new and different viewpoint in his teaching.

-- **In Eph. 3:1** he says, "For this cause I Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles,--" and, after a parenthetical section, continues in verses 13 and 14, "Therefore I desire that ye faint not at my tribulations for you, which is your glory. For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ --."

First of all, there is no suggestion that the imprisonment referred to began when he arrived in Rome. He had been a prisoner for over two years before he ever saw Rome (Acts 24:27). If we look back to the day he was first put in chains we see clearly why he could say, "I Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles --."

Paul had been ministering for many years among the pagan nations of the Roman Empire. When he was in Jerusalem he was accused of bringing Greeks (Gentiles, not Greek speaking Jews) into the Temple. After being rescued from the angry mob he was placed in protective custody by the Roman soldiers. Given liberty to speak to the assembled Jews, he spoke in Hebrew and received their full attention. All went well, even when he told of his conversion to Christ (Acts 22:6 - 16), even when he told of Christ's prophecy that Israel would not receive his testimony (Acts 22:18). It appeared the problem might be peacefully resolved, and Paul set at liberty, until he said one word. That word was "**GENTILES**" (Acts 22:21, 22). When he related Christ's commission to him, "I will send thee for hence unto the Gentiles," they suddenly exploded into violent action. This made it necessary for Paul to continue in his chains, chains he still wore as he wrote Ephesians. He was wearing these chains, then, not because of a change of program and message at Rome, but because of a commission given him at his conversion (Acts 26:13 - 17). This commission was re-emphasized later as he prayed in the Temple, and it was carried out during his Acts ministry -- a commission to preach to the Gentiles.

But wasn't this imprisonment linked to the revelation of the mystery in Ephesians 3:1 - 9? Yes indeed. This very mystery had been the basis for his previous Gentile ministry. He does not say that the mystery was hidden during Acts. As a matter of fact, he reminds them that he had previously written about it -- though briefly (since the full treatment of the subject awaited the writing of the Ephesian and Colossian letters). To what does he refer when he says, "I wrote afore in few words" (Eph. 3:3)? Does he refer to an earlier part of this Ephesian letter? No, for if this was his thought why would he say, "If indeed you have heard ... as I wrote before in brief. And by referring to this, when you read you can understand my insight into the mystery of Christ,--" (Eph. 3:2 - 4)? Did he think they had started reading in the middle of this letter? Was there a previous letter to the Ephesians, now lost? This is a possibility of course, but very unlikely. He does not say, "I wrote to you in brief" -- but merely that it had been put into writing. He probably was referring to such passages as Romans 16:25, 26 and 1 Cor. 2:7, 8. The specifics as to what the mystery was, are given in Eph. 3:6: that the Gentiles should be fellow-heirs, and of the same Body, and partakers of His promise in Christ by the gospel." The fact that we are fellow-heirs is taught in Rom. 8:17 (the same Greek word as is found in Eph. 3:6). The truth that the Body is to be a "Joint Body" composed of both Jews and Gentiles is

taught very clearly in 1 Cor. 12:12, 13 and Gal. 3:28. Being "fellow partakers of the promise in Christ" is carefully noted in Eph. 3:6 as coming through the gospel, not through a new message and program!

There is not one whisper in Eph. 3:1 and context that the program under consideration began in the middle of Paul's four or more years imprisonment -- when he arrived in Rome!

-- **In Eph. 4:1** Paul again refers to himself as a prisoner of the Lord. As such he urges believers in Ephesus to "Walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called." He does not indicate in any way that the calling dated from his arrival in Rome. Instead he links it to the preservation of the unity of the Spirit (Eph. 4:3), with its "one Body" (Eph. 4:4) -- a truth given over and over in the Pre-prison Epistles (as we shall note more fully elsewhere).

-- **The mention of his chains in Eph. 6:19, 20** is very significant. "And for me, that utterance may be given unto me, that I may open my mouth boldly, to make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in bonds ['chains' -- NASB]; that therein I may speak boldly as I ought to speak."

He is not here asking for prayer that he may initiate a new message -- but that he may speak boldly the message he has preached before. He was an ambassador back in 2 Cor. 5:20 but he became an ambassador in chains in Jerusalem. If he was put in chains for the message spoken of here he had to have preached it before he was put in chains. They did not put him in prison for what he would preacher later, but for what he had already been proclaiming. I can almost hear someone say, "But he spoke of himself as the prisoner of the Lord, and the Lord had him in prison so he could receive the mystery and make it known." This is not taught, anywhere, by Paul. Also, if the Lord put Paul into prison so he could receive the mystery and make it known, why did the Lord earlier try to save him from this prison experience by warning him against going to Jerusalem? See Acts 20:22, 23; 21:11, 12. When he spoke of himself as the "prisoner of the Lord" he did not mean that the Lord had put him there, but that, even in prison, he was still the Lord's man.

A parallel passage reads, "withal praying also for us, that God would open unto us a door of utterance, to speak the mystery of Christ, for which I am also in bonds ['chains']: that I may make it manifest, as I ought to speak" (Col. 4:4). Here also it is for preaching "the Word ... the mystery of Christ" (Col. 4:3 NASB) that he has been put in prison. Now he asks prayer that this very prison may be a pulpit from which he may preach his message as he "ought to speak."

-- **The Philippian church** was very close to Paul. He had established it back in Acts sixteen and had been in touch with it from then on as they sent, over and over, to meet his needs (Phil. 4:16). He notes with gratitude that they are partakers of grace with him, both in his imprisonment and in -- in **WHAT?** In getting out the new message revealed to him in his cell? No, rather, in the confirmation and defense of the gospel! (Phil. 1:7). Far from heralding a new message, they were continuing in and defending the old one!

-- **The Philippian church** has heard he is in prison and are concerned for his welfare. In assuring them that all is well, how natural it would be -- yea how necessary it would be -- to tell them, "I want you to know, brethren, that my circumstances [being in prison] have made it possible for me to receive a new revelation and institute a new program" -- **IF**, indeed, this were the case! Instead he assures them his bonds are for the greater progress of the gospel -- the

message he preached before, not the introduction of a new message (Phil. 1:12). Even those who are evidently hoping to take over the leadership of the church in Paul's absence are preaching the right message -- though from the wrong motive (Phil. 1:16, 18 [or 1:17, 18 in NASB]).

If Paul was preaching a new message and program how could these ambitious brethren better replace Paul's leadership than by accusing him of departing from the truth in his old age? They could have cried out, "We are preaching the message Paul used to preach, he has gone off on some new doctrine. If you want to stay with the truth, stick with us." This they did not do. There had evidently been no such change in Paul's message upon which they could base such a charge.

-- **In Philemon** (a Prison Epistle -- written at the same time as Ephesians and Colossians) he simply refers to himself as a prisoner in verses 1, 9, 10. In verse 13 he says, "Whom I wished to keep with me, that on your behalf he might minister to me in my chains for the gospel" (NKJV).

-- **As late as Second Timothy** he refers to another (his last) imprisonment and pleads with Timothy, "Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, or of me His prisoner; but join with me in suffering for the gospel according to the power of God" (2 Tim. 1:8 NASB). This message, his gospel, is that for which he is suffering imprisonment as a criminal (2 Tim. 2:8, 9 NASB).

Why didn't Paul get all excited about his Roman imprisonment being the occasion for a radical dispensational change -- as the Acts 28 people do? Is it because they put a significance on this period in his ministry that Paul did not? How else can it be explained?

INDICATIONS OF CONTINUITY BETWEEN PAUL'S EARLY AND LATER MINISTRY

As one reads through Paul's epistles he is greeted with a variety of topics and a rich experience in progressive revelation. But he is not conscious, at least in a casual reading, of disharmony between the early and later epistles. As a matter of fact, the arrangement of the books in our Bible, with the two groups interspersed with one another, forms a beautiful structure of truth for this age. This is noted well in a lengthy note on page 1660 of the Companion Bible.

The Acts 28 group make a great distinction in message and program between the epistles written before Acts 28 and those penned later. We need to see if the sense of continuity is merely an illusion of first impression, or whether a closer look will, with certainty, link these two groups together as one progressive revelation. We will examine briefly a few of the indications of the unbroken continuity we believe exists here.

-- **In Acts 23:11** the Lord stood at the side of His discouraged Apostle and said, "Be of good cheer, Paul: for as thou hast testified of me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome." Here is one of the appearances promised to Paul at his conversion (Acts 26:16). Instead of instructing Paul that there would soon be an interruption of his ministry, with a new revelation, he is assured of a continuity of that ministry, specifically mentioning his coming ministry in Rome.

-- **In Acts 26:16, 17** we have a record of what Christ said to Saul of Tarsus at the time of his conversion in Acts nine (though not recorded there). "But rise, and stand upon thy feet: for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee; delivering thee from the people [Israel], and from the Gentiles, unto whom now I send thee." In 1 Tim. 2:6, 7 Paul explains that he was appointed preacher, apostle and teacher of the Gentiles, bearing testimony that Christ "gave Himself a ransom for all." Thus at Paul's conversion he received the commission, to minister to Gentiles, that he still considers valid in First Timothy. There is no indication of a change in ministry. It may be objected that First Timothy may have been written before Acts 28. The evidence for two Roman imprisonments for Paul, with First Timothy penned sometime between them, seems to be valid and conclusive to this writer. This objection is weak indeed.

It may be further objected that in Acts 26:16¹ there is a reference to "those things in which I will appear unto thee" and that this is a promise of a new (and different) revelation that was made later in Rome. We have the record of several such appearances (Acts 18:9, 10; 22:17 - 21; 23:11; 2 Cor. 12:9), and other supernatural contacts with God (Acts 27:23, 24; 2 Cor. 12:4), before Acts 28. The only event that might be an appearance of Christ to Paul after his arrival in Rome is recorded in 2 Tim. 4:17. "Notwithstanding the Lord stood with me, and strengthened me, that by me the preaching might be fully known, and that all the Gentiles might hear --." This probably was not an actual appearance of Christ, but rather a case where men forsook him (v. 16) but the Lord did not. In any case, there is no reference to a revelation of truth at this time. The Lord is not spoken of as delivering a message. He is only represented as strengthening Paul in his defense before Caesar and the Roman court -- so as to make his words not only an effective defense, but also an effective presentation of the gospel he proclaimed.

-- **In Romans 1:3, 4** Paul speaks of Christ as "- the seed of David according to the flesh" and goes on to speak of His resurrection. In 2 Tim. 2:8 these two thoughts are still a part of his gospel, "- Jesus Christ of the seed of David was raised from the dead according to my gospel."

-- **Romans 16:25, 26**, when compared with Eph. 3:2 - 5, bridges over the gap between the early and later ministry of Paul -- for the mystery he speaks of in Ephesians had been preached already when he wrote Romans. "-- The mystery which was kept secret for long ages past ... has been made known to all nations -" (Rom. 16:25, 26 NASB). These verses receive more attention elsewhere in this paper.

-- **In Romans 1:15** Paul looked forward to this ministry in Rome as an opportunity to preach the gospel he had been preaching elsewhere. There is no hint of a change in ministry -- just ministering in a new location.

-- **Paul refers to his basic message** as "my gospel" in Romans 2:16. In 2 Timothy 2:8 he uses the same expression.

¹This statement of Christ is recorded in Acts 26, but it was uttered at Paul's conversion (which is related in Acts 9) -- when his whole ministry was still ahead of him.

-- **In 1 Corinthians 3:16** Paul says, "Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? (See also 1 Cor. 3:17 and 2 Cor. 6:16). In Ephesians 2:21, 22 we are told, "In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy Temple [the same Greek word] in the Lord: in whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit."

The objection that the Temple in 1 Cor. 3:16 is the body of the individual believer is not valid. True, in 1 Cor. 6:19 it is telling the individual that his physical body is the Temple of the Holy Spirit, but in the reference quoted above it says, "ye [plural] are the Temple [singular]."

It may be objected that immediately following the statement in 2 Cor. 6:16, " - ye are the temple of the living God" it continues, "- as God hath said, 'I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and they shall be my people.'"

"The Temple here is in fulfillment of Old Testament Scripture," it would be stated, "so this could not be a part of the Mystery Program." This objection, too, is invalid. The quotation given in verses 16 - 18 is in support of the principle of separation which Paul has been teaching in verses 14, 15 and the first part of verse 16 -- not in support of his statement about the Temple. The quote from Lev. 26:11 should read, "I will dwell among them" -- (in the kingdom situation), not "in" them as it is now. The Greek word in 2 Cor. 6:16 is "en" which is usually translated "in" -- but the Old Testament passage quoted says, "And I will set my Tabernacle [dwell] among you ... and I will walk among you --" (Lev. 26:11, 12). The Greek word "en" is translated "among" in such verses as Luke 10:3; Rom. 16:7; 1 Cor. 1:10 and 1 Cor. 3:18. (Try to substitute "in" for "among" in these passages to see that the word really can mean "among").

-- **The same expectation** set before the believer in First Thessalonians is before them also in Philipppians. The Thessalonian saints were waiting for God's Son from heaven (1 Thess. 1:10) and in Phil. 3:20 we are told, "For our conversation [citizenship] is in heaven: from whence also we look for the Savior --." The word is different, but the expectant attitude is the same -- and both passages direct our eyes to the same place (heaven) to wait for the same Savior.

-- **Paul speaks** of the "hope which is laid up for you in heaven" in Col. 1:5. What is set before us here is truly a heavenly hope. But, far from being a hope springing out of a new revelation received in Rome, Paul reminds them that they have already heard about this hope in the gospel. In verse six he makes it exceedingly clear that this hope is not something new. The gospel through which they heard of this hope had already been preached in all the world and had already been bringing forth fruit throughout the world. Hearing this pre-prison message is not linked here to a "kingdom program," but to knowing "the grace of God in truth." Again, the message and hope find no change at Acts 28.

-- In Col. 1:22 Paul tells us **the believer** is to be presented "holy and unblameable and unreprouvable in His sight." Does this depend upon them seeing a dispensational change at Acts 28, and becoming obedient to a new message and adopting a new hope? On the contrary, it depends on them continuing in the message which Paul had already preached "to every creature which is under heaven" and not being moved away from the hope of the gospel (a heavenly hope -- Col. 1:5) which they had already embraced (Col. 1:23). Acts 28 could hardly be more pointedly ignored than it is in this verse. It is more than ignored, it is ruled out as a place where significant changes have taken place in Paul's message. The word is not "if ye change" but "If ye continue."

-- **The Greek prefix "sun,"** which changes "Body" to "joint-Body" in Eph. 3:6, is one evidence of the continuity and unity of Paul's entire ministry. We will list a number of words using this prefix and show how they are used to describe believers both before and after Acts 28. The English prefix "joint" is seldom used in the translations, but the Greek prefix "sun" is there in every case.

- * "Joint-heirs" is found in both Rom. 8:17 and Eph. 3:6.
- * "Joint-crucified" is found in Rom. 6:6; Gal. 2:20, and Col. 2:20 ("died with [sun] Christ").
- * "Joint-buried" finds its place in Rom. 6:4 and Col. 2:12.
- * "Joint-workers" occurs often, both before and after Acts 28. See 1 Cor. 3:9; Rom. 16:3, 9, 21; 2 Cor. 1:24; 8:23; 1 Thess. 3:2 -- and -- Phil. 2:25; 4:3; Col. 4:11 and Philemon 24.

-- **Who can deny** that the purpose of God for the believer in Rom. 8:29, "- to be conformed to the image of His Son," is fulfilled when "- the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ ... shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto His glorious body --" (Phil. 3:20, 21)? "Be conformed to," in Rom. 8:29, is the same Greek word (*summorphos*) translated "fashioned like unto" in Phil. 3:21.

-- **Rom. 8:28 - 30** takes the believer from God's foreknowledge right on to his glorification without a break. If there was to be an interruption of His program, at Acts 28, of the magnitude envisioned by the Acts 28 teachers, it is surely not indicated here. True, Paul at this time might not have known of a future change of program, but God would know, and this passage is based on His foreknowledge, not Paul's.

-- **How can we understand** Phil. 4:1 without glancing at 1 Thess. 2:19, 20? Paul's converts (converted before Acts 28 in both cases) are referred to as his "joy and crown" both before and after Acts 28. Now if some of those converts in Thessalonica died before his Roman imprisonment (and some did, as 1 Thess. 4:13 indicates) are they to be present at the same coming that involves Paul? If the Rapture is not Paul's hope after Acts 28 then he will not be a part of it -- but the believers who died previous to that time will. How, then, can they be his joy and crown "at His coming [the Rapture]"? Further, if (as we are told) the hope of these believers who died before the end of Acts is the Millennial Kingdom, and Paul's hope is to be "in the heavenlies," Paul will be separated from them even after the Lord's coming. Has he lost his crown? No, these two passages also indicate that the program is not interrupted and exchanged for a new one at the close of Acts.

-- **When Paul,** just before his death, gave Timothy his final instructions, he told him, "And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also" (2 Tim. 2:2). Timothy was with Paul when he wrote Philippians and Colossians (Phil. 1:1; Col. 1:1) but Paul, referring back to the preceding years in Acts when Timothy was his companion in missionary work, urges him to teach what he heard then. In those days Paul was free to speak to multitudes; there were "many witnesses" to what Timothy heard him say. It is not reasonable that the expression "among many witnesses" would refer only to what he heard under very limited circumstances, in Paul's hired house in

Rome, and not also -- even primarily -- to what he had heard earlier.

The things he is to commit to others are further described in 2 Tim. 3:10 - 14 (NASB). "But you followed my teaching --" Paul says, and then gives a description of his missionary work during which this teaching took place. He notes that the opposition is growing even greater (v. 13) but urges Timothy to continue in the things he has learned and become convinced of -- the things he followed in verse 10. Since Paul is urging Timothy to continue in the teaching he heard and had had a part in before Paul was in prison in Rome, where is there room for a great dispensational change at Acts 28 which would have given Timothy a new message replacing the old one?

-- **There are other indications** of this continuity and unity of Paul's ministry but space forbids further examples. Why not look for them yourself? Let us see not only the seeming differences as we read Paul's letters! Let us also note carefully the connections. These connections tie his letters into one harmonious and remarkably complete revelation concerning this age of grace and the **ONE** Body. Let us see even the differences as the progressive revelation of the one mystery program!

THE BODY OF CHRIST.

It is essential to the acts 28 position that the "Body of Christ" in Romans and First Corinthians was not the same "Body of Christ" as that found in Ephesians and Colossians. As we compare what is said in the early letters with what is said in the Prison Epistles, it surely should be very clear (since Paul was an outstanding teacher and not given to muddying or vague and ambiguous writing) that the two are different -- **IF**, indeed, they **are** distinct and separate.

-- **In the early epistles** we are told "Now ye [believers] are the Body of Christ" (1 Cor. 12:27). The same thought is found in Eph. 1:22, 23 and Col. 1:18, 24 where it speaks of "the church [composed of believers] which is His Body."

-- **In the early letters** it speaks of "one Body" (Rom. 12:5; 1 Cor. 10:17 and 12:13). Also the thought is expressed in Gal. 3:28, even though the word "Body" is not used. In the prison letters it speaks of the one Body (Eph. 4:4 and Col. 3:15). The thought is in Eph. 2:14, 15, though the word "Body" is missing. (In light of the context, and the parallel passage in Col. 1:22, the "one body" ² in Eph. 2:16 appears to be Christ's fleshly body).

-- **The Body of Christ** is illustrated by the human body, both in the pre-prison documents (Rom. 12:4, 5; 1 Cor. 12:12, 14 - 26) and in Ephesians (Eph. 5:28, 29).

-- **Individual believers** are said to be members of the Body of Christ, both in the former epistles (Rom. 12:5; 1 Cor. 12:14, 27) and the latter ones (Eph. 3:6; 5:30).

-- **Both Jew and Gentile** are said to compose this one Body according to 1 Cor. 12:13 and Gal. 3:28. This is also taught in Eph. 2:16 and 3:6

²In this paper the word "body" will consistently be capitalized when it is referring to the mystical Body of Christ to distinguish it from references to the physical body.

-- **While it is specifically stated** in the Prison Epistles that Christ is the Head of the Body (Eph. 1:22; 4:15; 5:23; Col. 1:18; 2:10, 19), it is clearly intimated also in 1 Cor. 11:3. When it states that "the head of every man is Christ" the context indicates believing men are in view. It is understandable that the head-ship of Christ should appear more clearly in Ephesians and Colossians since the very theme of these two books is the relationship of the Body to its Head (with the Body emphasized in Ephesians and the Head given the prominence in Colossians).

-- **The Body in Ephesians** is something new. Eph. 2:15 speaks of it as "one new man." However it is not "new" with regard to a previous Body, but with reference to the former division and enmity between Jew and Gentile, a division already healed in Rom. 10:12 and Gal. 3:28. There is something new in Corinthians also -- a new creation, even all things new (2 Cor. 5:17).

-- **The Body is called "The Christ"** (the definite article is present in the Greek) in 1 Cor. 12:12. In Ephesians Christ is called the "Savior of the Body" (Eph. 5:23). Of the two expressions the one in Corinthians gives us the more exalted view of the Body.

-- **With so many things in common**, if the Body after Acts 28 is not the same Body as the one before, we will need a verse specifically telling us so. There is no such verse. Nowhere does Paul speak of a "different Body," a "New Body," or even "Another [previous] Body."

TWO BODIES

What are the arguments advanced to indicate two Bodies instead of one? (One at a time, of course, but a total of two nonetheless).

-- **The claim is made** that the Body after Acts 28 is a "Joint-Body" -- that before it was just a "Body." If "Body" refers to one entity and "Joint-Body" to a different one, then the Acts 28 group cannot claim the book of Colossians, nor even all of Ephesians, as their Scriptures (directly to them). In Colossians it always uses the word "Body," not "Joint-Body," and even in Ephesians the former word is used several times while the latter is used only once (Eph. 3:6). Their theory divides not merely between the Pre-prison Epistles and the Prison Epistles -- it divides between Eph. 3:6 and all the rest of Paul's writings, including the remainder of Ephesians!

-- **Ephesians speaks** of the Body of Christ as the one new man (Eph. 2:15), while the earlier Body (so they say) is called a chaste virgin -- a female (2 Cor. 11:2). Therefore they can't be the same Body, they conclude.

Notice carefully the wording of 2 Cor. 11:1, 2: "Would to God ye could bear with me a little in my folly; and, indeed, bear with me. For I am jealous over you with a godly jealousy; for I have espoused you to one husband that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ." It doesn't say here that the Body of Christ is a chaste virgin. The word "Body" is not used. It is speaking of the relationship of individual believers in Corinth to Christ. Also, he is using a

"foolish" illustration of a principle he wishes to apply.

Actually it would be easier to teach that the Body of Christ is female from Ephesians five than from this verse. It says in Eph. 5:25, 26, "- Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her, that He might sanctify her --" (NASB). In the Greek "it" (KJV) is a feminine pronoun. I grant that these two verses do not prove the Body is female, but neither does 2 Cor. 11:2! When considering gender, it is well to remember that, in Greek, the word "body" is neuter and the word "church" is feminine -- as is the word "head."

-- **In First Corinthians twelve** the head of the Body includes believers (the argument goes -- see verses 16, 17, 21), while the Head of the Body in Ephesians and Colossians is Christ.

In 1 Cor. 12:14 - 26 Paul is not speaking of the Body of Christ, but of the human body as an illustration of the Body of Christ. The application to the mystical Body is made in verse 27. Believers are members of the mystical Body as teachers, evangelists, etc. -- not as eyes, ears or feet.

Also Eph. 5:23 tells us that "The husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the Head of the church -." Now in what sense is the husband the head of the wife? Has her head been removed and her decapitated husband's head sewed to her neck? Are her eyes and ears not hers, but her husband's? Is everything above the neck "husband" and all below "wife"? Of course not! This headship involves the husband taking the place of leadership and loving responsibility in the relationship. So it is with the church. Paul says so.

In Corinthians Christ does have a Headship over believing men that, similar to the relationship of Christ to the church in Ephesians five, is parallel to the headship of the husbands (1 Cor. 11:3).

The necessary indications that the Body after Acts 28 is a different Body than the one previously spoken of are completely missing from the writings of Paul.

WHO IS IN THE "JOINT-BODY"?

The Acts 28 group place a great deal of emphasis on the expression "Joint-Body." This word in Eph. 3:6 is made to characterize the "Body" of the Prison Epistles as over against the "Body" in Romans and Corinthians. The Greek prefix "*sun*" used here means "together." Yet their doctrine leads to the conclusion that this prefix is empty of all real significance in their practice.

If the Acts 28 theory is valid, then at Acts 28 all of those in the Acts Body were taken into the Joint-Body (in some undefined way), for those addressed as being in the Joint-Body were saved previous to Acts 28. At the time of their salvation they had been "- all baptized into one Body" by the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 12:13). If only those understanding and accepting the new revelation (said to have been given to Paul in Rome) were taken into the new Body, then the others must have continued in the former Body (they were surely not disembodied were they?). This would result in two distinct and separate Bodies of Christ at the same time that Paul stated so clearly and dogmatically, "There is one Body." Whether weighed against human nature or the somewhat parallel situations found in Scripture, it is wholly beyond the realm of possibility that every Acts believer would immediately understand and embrace Paul's "new teaching."

The same situation exists today, and for the same reason. Every believer must be a member of the Joint-Body. The alternatives are ridiculous.

Since (according to the Acts 28 teachers) the Prison Epistles are written only to the members of the Joint-Body, any believer not a member of that Body could not claim those epistles as written to him. If he is a member of the Body spoken of in Romans and Corinthians then, even today, there are two Bodies, not just one.

If he is not a member of that earlier Body either, then (since the Pre-prison Epistles are addressed to the original Body of Christ), he cannot even claim the earlier epistles as to him. He would be a disembodied believer with NO Pauline Scripture addressed to him! Surely even Acts 28 teachers would have to agree that all true believers today are in the Joint-Body.

But, if all believers are in the Joint-Body, are they really "together" as the word used in Eph. 3:6 indicates? I contend that the Acts 28 teachers, in effect, dis-joint the Joint-Body. The teaching of at least a few of them is that some, being merely saved, will end up in the kingdom program on earth. According to them others, holding the mid-Acts view, will be in the New Jerusalem; but the elite, super spiritual, intellectual believers who have arrived at the Acts 28 view will be "in the heavenlies." This divides the doctrine of the members of the Body -- with three different hopes involved. It also will separate them physically, in resurrection, dividing them in three ways for eternity. The joint-Body, according to their teaching will be dis-jointed forever.

What about the Twelve Apostles? Are they in the Joint-Body? Of course those who may have died (as James did -- Acts 12:2) before the close of Acts are not in view in this particular argument. Whether The Twelve are in the Body of Christ or not is a live issue among mid-Acts teachers, but it must surely be a settled matter with the Acts 28 group. After all, if Paul was taken into the Joint-Body what would exclude Peter or John? Was Paul an apostle? So were they. Were they kingdom apostles? So was he -- according to their doctrine. Was Paul a member of the earlier Body? Surely they were also if Paul was preaching the same message they were preaching and carrying on the same program -- as the Acts 28 people assert was the case. Can they really say that in the Joint-Body all distinctions disappear, if any true believer was excluded for any reason?

But if Peter and John were taken into the Joint-Body what kind of ministry did they have after Acts 28? If these teachers insist that Paul was fully identified with the preaching and practice of the twelve before Acts 28, what would prevent them from being fully identified with him in his preaching and practice after Acts 28? After all, they would be members of a Joint-Body where there is neither Jew nor Gentile. Since Israel's blindness and setting aside would now be total (so they say) rather than partial, as it was before, surely the ministry of Peter and John would be to the Joint-Body. There would be no other Jewish believers to write to. How could they write to Jewish believers if there was totally no difference? How could they write to Israel when Israel had been totally set aside? This line of reasoning puts the Acts 28 group in the position (if they are consistent) of telling us that half of Paul's letters are not to us, while at least one of Peter's letters and all of the writings of John (being written after Acts 28) are directed to the Body of Christ -- the Joint-Body!

But they do not teach that Peter's and John's writings are to us. Why not? Is it because they are unwilling to face the logical consequences of their doctrine? Or is it because they have been so busy repudiating the pre-Acts 28 ministry of Paul that they have not realized they are, at the same time, coming under the post-Acts ministries of these other writers?

A careful investigation of just who is in the Joint-Body, on the basis of their views, indicates their position relative to the beginning of the Body of Christ is untenable. It is, as brother Vernon Anderson puts it, "The impossible Acts 28 position."

THE HEAVENLIES -- A SUPER HOPE?

At least some of the Acts 28 people (far from humble) teach that "the heavenlies" (not merely "heaven") is the place where will be. They say that we poor mid-Acts people will have to be content with the New Jerusalem, and the babes in Christ who are merely saved will end up in the Millennial Kingdom on earth. This is not taught by Paul! ³ This Greek word translated "heavenly places," "heaven," "celestial," "heavenly," and "high" in the King James Version is said to refer to a "super heaven." It is the Greek word "*epouranios*." Let us briefly review the passages using this Greek word:

When Christ talked to Nicodemus about the new birth He was speaking of "heavenly" things (John 3:12). The Jewish believers addressed in Hebrews were partakers of a "heavenly" calling (Heb. 3:1) and were looking forward, as did Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (Heb. 11:8 - 10, 13 - 16), to a "heavenly" city (Heb. 11:16), the "heavenly" Jerusalem (Heb. 12:22).

Paul assures the believers in Corinth that there is such a thing as a "heavenly" ("celestial" in the KJV) body (1 Cor. 15:40). He adds that since they are a "heavenly" people they will bear the image of the "heavenly" Savior -- and have a body like His resurrection body (1 Cor. 15:48, 49 -- and compare Phil. 3:21).

How is this word used in the Prison Epistles? Does it there clearly teach that the "heavenlies" is the eternal abode of only Acts 28 people? If this is true, surely Paul will make it plain!

Philippians. Those who are in "heaven" (the heavenlies) will bow before Christ and confess that Jesus Christ is Lord (Phil. 2:10 -- NASB). It does not say who these individuals are.

Colossians. This word does not occur even once in this book.

Ephesians. Five times Paul refers to "the heavenlies" in this prison epistle (though not

³I sincerely hope this is not taught by all of those who hold the Acts 28 view in other respects. It was taught, however, by at least one national pastor in the Philippines where the author met with this teaching.

translated that way in the KJV). Surely here he will tell us plainly that this is the hope of the Acts 28 people. Let us investigate:

It must be discouraging to them to notice that there is wickedness in "the heavenlies" -- the super heavenlies! This wickedness is due to the presence there of "principalities . . . powers . . . the rulers of the darkness of this world" (Eph. 6:12).

Paul informs us that we (the church -- not just those who follow the Acts 28 doctrine) are a testimony to these principalities and powers, teaching them the manifold wisdom of God (Eph. 3:10). Does this verse prove that believers will be in "the heavenlies" in the future life? No, for that testimony is being borne now, not after we arrive in heaven.

We have been blessed with all spiritual blessings in "the heavenlies" (Eph. 1:3). Are these blessings something believers did not have until Acts 28, and that they have now only if they follow that doctrine? Looking at the context, we observe that these blessings include being chosen (1: 4), predestinated (1:5), accepted (1:6), redeemed (1:7), forgiven (1:7), made heirs (1:11), and sealed with the Holy Spirit (1:13, 14). Were these made ours only after the close of the book of Acts? Are they only for the Acts 28 people now? No, for all these concepts can be found, either stated or implied, in the Pre-prison Epistles.

Of course Christ has been seated, ever since His ascension, in "the heavenlies" (Eph. 1:20) -- but what about us?

The remaining passage using the Greek word *epouranios* (Eph. 2:6) must be the one to prove the whole theory about the super heavens as taught by the twenty-eighters -- for the others surely did not do so! Notice it does not say that anyone will be "in the heavenlies" in the future and through eternity! What it does say is that we believers are seated there NOW in Christ. Just who is so seated, and when did this first become a truth for us? Look first at the verse itself. The ones who are "joint-seated" (*sunkathizo*) are those who are "joint-raised from the dead" (*sunegiro*). While it is true that neither of these Greek words are found in the Pre-prison Epistles, the truths they represent are found there. That the believer was joint-crucified and joint-buried is taught in Romans 6:6; Gal. 2:20 and Rom. 6:4. That the believer was raised with Christ is clearly indicated when Rom. 6:4 - 11 is studied carefully. This co-resurrection is a necessary corollary of the co-crucifixion and co-burial. Otherwise the believers addressed in Romans were left in Christ's grave until Paul arrived in Rome! It is this same identification with Christ that makes possible our standing -- both as being dead on the one hand and being risen on the other. Having been identified with Christ in death, burial and resurrection, did the early believers have to stand around in heaven (positionally) until, finally, Paul specifically mentioned their being seated?

The context for the preceding verse (Eph. 2:5) tells us when these Ephesians were seated. It was not "when you came into the knowledge of the mystery" or "when the new Body was formed" or even "when you were only kingdom saints" -- but it was "**WHEN YOU WERE DEAD IN SINS.**" Back during the history covered in the book of Acts, before Paul was imprisoned, when they were **LOST**, a wonderful change came to them upon simply believing. They suddenly were quickened (made alive), raised from the dead, and seated in the heavenlies

in Christ -- all because "by grace you **HAVE BEEN SAVED**" (Eph. 2:5 NASB). It was **not**, note it well, because of anything that happened at Acts 28 or afterward!

I do not say that the believers today will not be in the heavenlies in the future, for I believe they will, but there is no verse in the Prison Epistles that says so! The only one that speaks of our being in the heavenlies at all presents this as the standing of all members of the Body of Christ -- even before the close of the book of Acts.

But isn't our "citizenship" (Phil. 3:20 NASB) in heaven? Of course. But here (as in many other pertinent passages) it is not the "super heavens" (*epouranios*) but just "heaven" (*ouranos*) which is in view. Not until we avoid this artificial distinction between these two Greek words can we have scriptural grounds for expecting to be in heaven for eternity.

It is clear that the word *epouranios* does not at all carry the meaning in Scripture given it by the Acts 28 men -- nor is it represented as a special place for those holding their position.

THE BOOK OF ACTS.

A close scrutiny of the entire book of Acts is far beyond the scope of this paper.⁴ We will content ourselves with a look at some of the more important portions relating to our theme.

Few serious dispensationalists would fail to see in the first part of this book an express offer of the kingdom to Israel (Acts 3:19 - 21) and a flagrant rejection of that offer (Acts chapter seven). It is not so clearly discerned that the response was final, and that there is no further such offer recorded in Acts or in any of Paul's epistles.

God looked upon the stoning of Stephen as Israel's final answer to His offer of the kingdom. This is indicated by the following considerations:

-- **The offer of the kingdom had been specifically made before Acts seven.** "Repent therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, that so may come times of refreshing from the Lord, and that He may send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you --" (Acts 3:19, 20). Obviously the millennial kingdom -- complete with its King -- was being offered here.

-- **This offer reached the ears of the Sanhedrin.** Understandably the offer was not made formally before them, though they were the ruling body in Israel whose decision was essential for any issue touching the nation as a whole. Would the Sanhedrin have invited, or even allowed, the apostles to present God's offer to them? Certainly not! Therefore it was made in public, but at a place (the Temple) and at a time (the hour of prayer) when the nation's leadership would most certainly hear it, or hear about it. Obviously, in addressing his remarks

⁴For such a study the reader is referred to an exhaustive and enlightening treatment of the book of Acts written by Cornelius R. Stam and published in four volumes, "Acts Dispensationally Considered."

to those who had "denied the Holy One and the Just, and ... killed the Prince of Life --" (Acts 3:14, 15) Peter was speaking to the Sanhedrin. The murder of Christ was their decision, not merely that of those individual Jews who had been swept along by the mob at the crucifixion.

Later, in chapters four and five, the apostles were twice actually brought before the Sanhedrin. These leaders were not interested in hearing the offer of the kingdom in more detail. They were set on shutting the mouths of those making the offer. They were accused by the apostles of responsibility for Christ's death and were told that, as builders (supposedly working toward Israel's kingdom), they had rejected the cornerstone for the building (Acts 4:11).

-- **The rejection was unmistakable and final.** Stephen was convinced they had already made up their mind, and closed his address with a stinging accusation, "Ye stiff necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost . . . ye have been now the betrayers and murderers [of Christ]!" (Acts 7:51 - 53). As if to confirm Stephen's assessment of their attitude they gnashed on him with their teeth, shouted, stopped their ears, rushed upon him and cast him out of the city -- where they murdered him in cold blood before witnesses. Remembering that this was the concerted and unanimous action of the highest ruling body in Israel, how could the nation, as a nation, more emphatically and finally have rejected the offer made to them by God?

-- **God's response indicates He accepted their decision as final.** In Paul's first epistle he speaks of this. "[Israel] -- killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets, and drove us out; they are not pleasing to God, but hostile to all men, hindering us from speaking to the Gentiles that they might be saved; with the result that they always fill up the measure of their sins. But wrath has come upon them to the utmost" (1 Thess. 2:15, 16 NASB).

In Romans Paul refers to Israel as already judicially blinded (Rom. 11:7 - 10, 25). It was not (in verse 25) that Israel was partly blind, but that part of Israel was totally blind (v. 7). He states also that Israel had already fallen (Rom. 11:12) and had been cast away (Rom. 11:15).

-- **Only three years after Paul's conversion** (Gal. 1:18) Christ appeared to him while he was in the Temple in Jerusalem and said to him, "Make haste and get out of Jerusalem quickly, because they will not accept your testimony about me . . . Go! For I will send you away to the Gentiles" (Acts 22:18, 21 NASB). Here Christ recognized that the decision of Israel's leaders in Jerusalem, made earlier, was final.

-- **Even at Paul's conversion,** Christ indicated the nation's choice had already been made. He said to Paul, "-- for this purpose I have appeared to you, to appoint you a minister and a witness . . . delivering you from the [Jewish] people and from the Gentiles to whom I am sending you" (Acts 26:16, 17 NASB). Since his ministry (bringing riches to the Gentiles) was based on the fall and casting away of Israel, the die had, evidently, already been cast at this time.

The following considerations indicate the kingdom was not offered to Israel after the stoning of Stephen in Acts seven:

-- **There is no verse** from Acts eight through the end of the book where such an offer is specifically made.

-- **The offer had to be made** to the leaders of Israel, the Sanhedrin, the only ones with the authority to make a decision for the nation. This religious and legislative body is not once mentioned after Acts seven until it is convened (Acts 22:30; 23:1 -- "council" is "Sanhedrin") to hear Paul's defense. Aside from this one occasion, and references to it, this ruling body is never mentioned again. What was said in this brief but stormy confrontation is a matter of record, and there was no reference to the kingdom. The message delivered the previous day also contained no such offer. Instead, there was a report of how the Lord had recognized Israel's stubborn unbelief and had sent Paul to the Gentiles as a result of it (Acts 22:18 - 21). If God had intended this meeting with the Sanhedrin in Jerusalem to be the occasion for another offer to the nation, why did He so persistently warn Paul against going there (Acts 20:22 - 24; 21:10 - 13)?

-- **If Paul was offering the kingdom** in his missionary efforts, he was offering it to Gentiles as well as to Jews, for the same message he preached to the one he preached to the other (Acts 13:42; 20:21).

-- **When Paul turned from the Jews** to the Gentiles he said, "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). Consider carefully, it was not the kingdom he was preaching, nor was it the kingdom of which they had judged themselves unworthy. Also, in the following two verses (13:47, 48) not the kingdom but salvation and eternal life were the issues.

-- **The "hope of Israel"** Paul mentions in Acts was not the kingdom, but resurrection (Acts 26:6 - 8).

-- **When Paul preached** that Jesus was the Christ ("Messiah" -- Acts 17:3; 18:5) he was not offering the kingdom, but identifying who Jesus was. If this sounds "Jewish," let one reflect that Paul referred to our Lord as "Christ" ("Messiah") forty six times in Ephesians, thirty seven times in Philippians, and twenty six times in Colossians -- all in these "Prison Epistles."

-- **If the references to the kingdom of God** in Acts 14:22; 19:8; 20:25 and 28:23 indicate he was offering the kingdom to Israel, then he continued to offer it to Israel for two full years after he arrived in Rome (Acts 28:30, 31) and was also offering it in Colossians (4:11)!

-- **Paul describes the ministry** which he received of the Lord Jesus (that he expected to continue in Jerusalem, and until his course was finished) not as an offering of the kingdom to Israel, but as a testifying to the gospel of the grace of God (Acts 20:24).

-- **Paul's burden for Israel** during his Acts ministry was not to see them established in their kingdom. Instead, he wept over them because they were not saved (Rom. 9:1 - 3; 10:1; 11:14; etc.). The gospel that was "to the Jew first" was not spoken of as the power of God unto acceptance of the kingdom, but the power of God unto salvation (Rom. 1:16). He sought out the Jews first, but this does not indicate he had a different message for them. The same epistle stipulating "to the Jew first" as far as the order of hearing it is concerned (Rom. 1:16) tells us "there is no difference" as concerns the message to them (Rom. 3:22; 10:12).

-- **If Acts 28:28 marks the time** when there would be no more offer of that kingdom to Israel, then Paul never offered that kingdom. Acts 28:28 says, "Let it be known to you therefore, that this salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles --." When had it been sent to them? At Acts 18:6? No, earlier than that. At Acts 13:46? No, still earlier. It was when Paul was converted in Acts nine that Christ said to him, "- delivering you from the Jewish people and the Gentiles, to whom I am sending you" (Acts 26:17 NASB). Is it objected that in this verse he is being sent to both "the Jewish people and the Gentiles"? It appears that the deliverance is from the Jews and the commission is to the Gentiles -- but if not, then hear Christ speaking to Paul just three years later. "Go! For I will send you far away to the Gentiles" (Acts 22:21). Subsequently Paul turned to the Gentiles (Acts 13:46) and went to them (Acts 18:6) but he had already, shortly after his conversion, been sent to the Gentiles with his gospel.

Then what was Paul doing in Acts as far as Israel was concerned? More importantly, what was God doing through him?

In early Acts God was offering the kingdom to Israel as a nation. This offer could only be made at the capital city, Jerusalem; and only be acted on by their constituted leaders, the Sanhedrin. The offer was rejected by that body and Israel, as a nation, was set aside.

In the remainder of Acts God is manifesting His faithfulness to individual Jews, as such, who were scattered all over the Roman Empire. They had had no voice in the decision reached by their leaders. God could not recognize their place of privilege as Jews by offering them the kingdom, for that decision had to be made at headquarters -- and had already been finalized. But He could give them the first opportunity to hear the gospel of salvation and be saved by God's grace. This He did through Paul's ministry. In city after city the Jews heard first. Some believed, but when the majority, like their leaders, rejected the message it was taken to the local Gentiles.

Did anything special happen when Paul arrived in Rome? By that time the ground had been covered geographically. The individual Jews from Jerusalem, capital of Judaism, to Rome, capital of Gentiledom, had had their opportunity to hear the gospel. God had shown Himself faithful to them. He had gone the second mile. From then on there was no further requirement to seek out Jews first to hear the salvation message.

The scattered Jews had a right to expect the signs promised in the Old Testament as long as God was speaking to them as Jews -- even though the message was strictly a personal salvation offer. The signs continued. Special terminology having meaning for them, but more or less meaningless to Gentiles, was retained. But once the ground had been covered geographically from Jerusalem to Rome these adaptations could be deleted and the message and program, which had already been instituted, could enter into its full and normal course for this age. The same message of salvation continues to go to any Jew who will listen, but not on the basis that he is a Jew. He is now to be approached as just another sinner in need of a Savior. (A study of the Class Notes on First Corinthians, available from W. P. Heath, could be of help in better understanding the transition period.)

THE TESTIMONY OF ROMANS -- Israel's Blinding and Setting Aside.

The extreme dispensationalist claims that the blinding and setting aside of Israel before Acts 28 was partial, but after the end of Acts they were completely blinded and totally set aside -- ushering in the "mystery program" which had its beginning there.

It might be helpful to ask them several questions:

-- **Where**, in the Prison Epistles, does it say that this asserted change at Acts 28 came because of the complete setting aside of Israel?

The word "Israel" is found only in Phil. 3:5 and Eph. 2:12. In the former, Paul merely tells us he is an Israelite by birth; in the latter he states that before the "one new man" we Gentiles were excluded from the commonwealth of Israel.

The word "Jew" is used only once in these letters. Col. 3:11 reveals that when we have put on the new man there is neither Greek nor Jew, but Christ is all and in all. None of these touch on the setting aside of Israel. Where, then, is their verse?

-- **Where**, in the Prison Epistles, does it say that a total blindness has come to Israel? Both the noun and verb "blind" are completely missing from these letters, as is the verb "blinded." The word "blindness" which is used in Rom. 11:25 is found only once in the Prison Epistles, in Eph. 4:18. But there nothing is said about the blindness of Israel. Instead it has to do with the blindness of Gentiles! "Walk not as other Gentiles walk ... being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart" (Eph. 4:17, 18). Where is their verse?

-- **Where**, even in the Pre-prison Epistles, does it teach that a total blindness will come on Israel? The very point of Romans chapters nine to eleven is that both the blindness (Rom. 11:25) and the setting aside (Rom. 9:27, 29; 11:1 - 5) are partial and temporary. Notice it well that following the fall and casting away of Israel there is to come their fulness and the receiving of them as alive from the dead (Rom. 11:1, 12, 15). There is no mention here of a harder fall and a more complete setting aside still ahead of them. Where is their verse?

-- **In Paul's earliest letter** he states, "But wrath has come upon them [the Jews] to the utmost" (1 Thess. 2:16 -- NASB). **Where**, in the Prison Epistles, does it say there was a greater wrath in store for them, which befell them after Paul arrived in Rome? The word used here for "wrath" is found six times in the Prison Epistles. The Gentiles addressed in Ephesians two (see 2:11) were "children of wrath" before their salvation (2:3). The "wrath of God [cometh] upon the children of disobedience" according to Eph. 5:6. (The present tense ["cometh"] rules out a reference to Israel's having been put under God's wrath at Acts 28. Col. 3:6 is an exact parallel reference here). Eph. 4:31 and Col. 3:8 are speaking about men's wrath, as is the remaining passage in 1 Tim. 2:8. Where, then, is their verse?

It is obvious that they must go outside the Prison Epistles for the thought that the dispensation of grace was introduced upon the fall of Israel. It is equally clear that outside the Prison Epistles this setting aside was partial and temporary, and had already taken place before Paul wrote his first epistle!

It is to be expected that they have a verse -- or perhaps several of them -- upon which they depend for this teaching. But in our search we do not find a single one teaching a complete blinding and total setting aside for Israel as a nation which took place at Acts 28.

THE TESTIMONY OF ROMANS -- The Olive Tree

It is important to see that the Olive Tree in Rom. 11:17 - 24 relates to God's testimony in the world. The only other significant reference to the olive tree in the New Testament is Rev. 11:4. Here the "two olive trees" are called also "two candlesticks." In Zech. 4:2, 3, 11 - 14 we discover why these men have the double designation of "olive trees" and "candlesticks." The candlesticks are not holding candles, as we know them, but lamps that are fed by the "golden oil" flowing from the olive trees through the "golden pipes." That the idea portrayed is testimony is crystal clear, for in Rev. 11:3 these two men are called "witnesses."

God has had a testimony in the world ever since He cast the Gentiles aside in Genesis eleven. At first it was Abraham and his descendents. Later, when Israel became a nation, they were God's witnesses. They are described as "a kingdom of priests" (Ex. 19:6), "ministers of our God" (Isa. 61:6), "My servant" (Isa. 44:1) and "My witnesses" (Isa. 44:8). "'- You are my witnesses,' declares the Lord, 'that I am God'" (Isa. 43:12 -- NKJV).

But, in Jeremiah's day, Israel had been taken into captivity and even Judah had lost its testimony. "-- Your gods are as many as your cities, O Judah; and as many as the streets of Jerusalem are the altars you have set up to the shameful thing, altars to burn incense to Baal" (Jer. 11:13 NASB). In light of this Jeremiah continues, "The Lord called your name 'A Green Olive Tree, Beautiful in Form.' With the noise of a great tumult He has kindled a fire on it, and its branches are worthless" (Jer. 11:16). The Revised Standard Version and the Amplified Bible translate the last phrase, "its branches will be consumed." At that time many in Judah were destroyed and the rest taken into captivity -- but a limited testimony still went out through Israel as Ezekiel and Daniel lived and wrote for God among the Gentiles.

After Israel crucified her Messiah, and further spurned Him even after His resurrection, it was time for an even greater fire to be kindled on the "Green Olive Tree" (See 1 Thess. 2:15, 16). Instead, God pushed the time of "Jacob's trouble" (Jer. 30:7) into the distant future, removed the nation, as such, from its place of testimony (the breaking off of the branches) and began a new unprophesied program. The responsibility of being God's witnesses in the world passed largely to Gentiles (the grafting in of the wild olive branches). The ministry for this age of grace was entrusted to one who was a "Hebrew of the Hebrews" -- but a Roman citizen and apostle to the Gentiles (Phil. 3:5; Acts 22:27, 28; Rom. 11:13). He passed the torch of testimony on (2 Tim. 2:2) to one young man who was half Jew and half Gentile, and (in Titus) to another who was a Gentile. From that time on the ministry was more and more a Gentile undertaking. An occasional son of Abraham joined in the testimony as an evidence that the setting aside of Israel is not total.

Does it offend the sensibilities of some to think of themselves as grafted into this place of testimony among the (Jewish) natural branches? Then should they not also recoil from Eph. 2:19 where, as the context discloses, the saints among whom we are "fellow-citizens" are Jewish

saints?

What is God's present witness in the world (His Olive Tree)? Was there a time, later than the writing of Romans, when all of the natural branches were broken off? In Paul's language, when he ponders this suggestion (Rom. 11:1), "God forbid!" Has the tree itself been cut down? That would, in the symbolism of this chapter, leave God without a witness. No, today, and in the day Paul penned Romans, the wild olive branches are still grafted in among the few remaining natural ones.

What is the future of the Olive Tree? The day will come when Christendom will have so lost her testimony that the believing remnant -- both Jews and Gentiles -- will be taken to glory, the remaining unprofitable wild olive branches cut off, and the natural branches grafted back in. Israel will be given the responsibility as God's witness in the world once again.

As soon as the Rapture occurs the responsibility for testimony in the world is placed back upon Israel. Those Gentiles who had a real ministry have been taken to heaven and God starts over "from scratch" with 144,000 Israelites. These witnesses are not some sect of Christianity, but Jews -- very carefully related to their respective tribes (Rev. 7:4 - 8). Twice in the messages to the seven churches (tribulation churches, in the primary meaning of the passage) there is reference to those who say they are Jews and are not, but do lie (Rev. 2:9; 3:9). Why would they claim to be Jews if not in order to minister to these churches? To be sure, many Gentiles will be won to Christ during this time and have a personal testimony, but one looks in vain for a Gentile ministry in the book of Revelation. The wild branches have been broken off and the natural branches have been grafted back in.

When, at the return of Christ, all Israel shall have been saved, they will finally be what God from the first intended them to be -- His servants, His ministers, His witnesses and a kingdom of priests. Then it will come to pass that "-- ten men . . . out of all languages of the nations . . . shall take hold of the skirt of him that is a Jew, saying, We will go with you: for we have heard that God is with you" (Zech. 8:23).

The Olive Tree is an answer to more than one false teaching.

It is the answer to those who teach that Israel has been totally abandoned by God, for some natural branches remain and others will later be grafted in again.

It poses a real problem for those who teach that the church will go through the Tribulation. In effect, the post tribulationists must say that the 144,000 saved Jews will be grafted into the church of this age. If their theory is correct, the natural branches of Romans eleven should be grafted in among the wild olive branches so they could serve together during the Tribulation. But Paul indicates the wild olive branches will be broken off first and then the natural branches will be grafted back into their own Olive Tree.

It is particularly devastating to the Acts 28 theory. They deny that today we are the branches grafted into the Olive Tree, but have no answer as to how the removal took place. Believers in the time that Romans was penned were in the Olive Tree, as the text in Romans

eleven verifies. This includes the believers to whom Paul later wrote in Ephesians. But how did these believers get out of the Olive Tree? It tells us that "because of UNBELIEF" the natural branches were broken off and that the branches from the wild olive tree would remain only if they "continue in His goodness." Did the new message and program said to have begun at Acts 28 cause these believers to fail to continue in His goodness -- to be "cut off" because of unbelief? No other explanation for severance of this relationship is found, either here or in the Prison Epistles. The abiding of the wild olive branches in the Olive Tree was to continue until such time as God was ready to graft in the natural branches again. This is further emphasized when it tells us that the partial blindness is to continue until the full number of Gentiles is brought in -- and be followed, not by an even more completely Gentile program, but by the salvation of all Israel! (Rom. 11:25, 26).

It should not have to be pointed out that the relationship to the Olive Tree does not have to do with the salvation of individuals, but with the responsibility for testimony of national Israel on the one hand and professing Christianity on the other. The natural branches which were broken off were not believing Jews who had had a lapse of faith, but the totally lost, unbelieving nation over which Paul weeps in Rom. 9:1 - 3 and 10:1. The wild olive branches to be cut off in the future will not be true believers who have fallen into sin or unbelief (for even these weak ones will be caught away to heaven). They will be the totally lost and unbelieving professing church which will be left behind at the Rapture to be swallowed up by the One World Church of the Tribulation.

THE TESTIMONY OF ROMANS -- The Doxologies.

It is little wonder that Paul bursts into a double doxology in Romans: one at the close of the parenthetical section (Romans chapters nine through eleven) and another at the close of the book.

In Rom. 11:33 - 36 Paul looks back upon God's dispensational strategy. *Had Israel crucified their Messiah?* -- God makes that crucifixion a basis for offering them, in good faith, forgiveness and their kingdom! *Have they rejected the offered kingdom?* -- God makes it the occasion for offering salvation to all sinners, Jew or Gentile, under a newly revealed program among Gentiles! *Has Israel been set aside nationally?* -- Salvation is still available to them personally and the very turning to Gentiles will provoke some Jews to jealousy and cause many of them to turn at last to the Savior! *Will even the Gentiles fail to appreciate this amazing grace and turn away in apostasy?* -- God will make it the occasion to work again among His own people! *Will the Gentiles be cut off from ministry during the Tribulation?* -- The Jewish evangelists will bring multitudes of Gentiles to the Cross during this period. Every time Satan thinks he has won a victory, God turns it into a demonstration of His wisdom and an outpouring of His grace!

God had made Israel's casting away to be riches to the Gentiles. The cutting off of the Gentiles will trigger the receiving of the favored nation back as from the dead. Their reinstatement will be much more riches for Gentiles. (See Pages 60 - 64 in "A City of Two Tales" by W. P. Heath, published by Grace Publications, Grand Rapids, Michigan.)

How unsearchable indeed are His judgments and his ways past finding out!

Let us not leave Romans 11:33 until we point out that the same word translated "past finding out" is used in Eph. 3:8 where it speaks of the "unsearchable" riches of Christ. If, in Ephesians, this word means that the riches of Christ are unsearchable because they cannot be traced through the Old Testament Scriptures, then the wisdom of God in His dispensational tactics (revealed in Romans chapters nine through eleven) also cannot be traced through the Old Testament. Both alike, in Romans and in Ephesians, are on "mystery" ground.

But does it not say specifically in Ephesians that the mystery spoken of in that book was "not made known unto the sons of men," and, in the same chapter, that it was "hid in God" (Eph. 3:5, 9)? This is true. But it also says in Rom. 16:25 that the mystery known in that book was "kept secret since the world began," and only now "made manifest" by prophetic writings -- evidently Paul's own writings (v. 26 -- Greek).

Romans 16:25, 26, as it stands, is a total and final blow to the Acts 28 view. Hence every effort has to be made, and has been made, by them to twist, distort, destroy or otherwise render ineffectual this glorious passage of Holy Writ.

Since some manuscripts do not have these verses it would seem easy to just disregard them and throw them away. This is not as easy as it sounds. It is not merely these two verses that have been omitted in some manuscripts -- but the entire fifteenth and sixteenth chapters of Romans. It is far easier to account for these two chapters, with their largely personal matters, being left off when making hand written copies of the heavy doctrinal portion, than to imagine such a lengthy passage being added as a "scribal error" of some kind. But even in some copies deleting chapters fifteen and sixteen, these verses are found at the end of chapter fourteen. In some (as though a scribe thought to close his copy with chapter fourteen and then changed his mind) they are found twice, both at the close of chapter fourteen and the end of chapter sixteen!

Not only that. There is a link between these verses and the opening of Romans which ties them in as a fitting and necessary conclusion to the book. In Rom. 1:11 Paul longs to see the believers in Rome that he might have a ministry among them, to the end that they might be "established." Then in Rom. 16:25 he tells us what it is that will "stablish" them (the same Greek word). It is Paul's gospel and the "preaching of Jesus Christ according to the revelation of the mystery" which will accomplish this. In Rom. 1:5 Paul tells us he has received "grace and apostleship to bring about obedience of faith among the Gentiles" (NASB). Then, in Rom. 16:26, the mystery (in light of which Paul could preach the gospel) "has been made known to all the nations, leading to the obedience of faith" (NASB).

Even E. W. Bullinger (who had a problem with these verses) agrees that they belong to Romans and that the epistle would be incomplete without them. His method of handling this passage is clever, but totally without scriptural proof. He suggests that Paul wrote the epistle without these verses and then -- after he arrived in Rome and had received the mystery -- added them to the letter they had received earlier. There is not even a hint of such a course of action in the Word, and so tampering with a document without stating that a change has been made borders on pious fraud. Also there are other indications this did not take place.

Paul's letters were widely copied and circulated even during his life time. He himself encouraged this in Col. 4:16, "And when this epistle is read among you, cause that it be read also in the church of the Laodiceans; and that ye likewise read the epistle from Laodicea." Peter, writing only about three years after Paul arrived in Rome, not only had a knowledge of all of Paul's epistles but assumed that those to whom he was writing did also. "As also in all of his epistles, speaking in them of these things; in which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do the other Scriptures, unto their own destruction" (2 Pet. 3:16). Since the believers in Rome had had this epistle for over two years before Paul arrived, it is reasonably certain there were copies of it widely scattered by the time Paul could have added anything to its contents. Such an addition would give the readers the false impression (false if he really did this) that the mystery was known and preached two years earlier than it was. Paul might not have foreseen the confusion this would cause in later years when various copies of the letter were compared, but surely the God who inspired him would not make such a serious blunder.

But even if they were added after Paul reached Rome these verses still are solid evidence that the mystery was known and preached before Acts 28.

Paul states clearly that the mystery which had been "kept secret for long ages past ... now is manifested, and ... has been made known to all nations --" (Rom. 16:25, 26 NASB). He is not saying, "It has been made available to all nations," but "it has been made known." He is not saying "It is being made known now that I am in Rome" but it "has been made known." Not merely had it already been made known when Paul penned these lines -- it had been made known to all nations. In days when there was no printing press, no telephone, no Fax machine, no fast transportation and no radio or television it would take time -- lots of time -- to make any message known to all nations. He can only be referring to his Acts ministry. It had taken him years of diligent work and hard travel to make his message known in other areas so that he could be free to go to Rome (Rom. 15:20 - 24). As a prisoner in Rome, totally unable to travel, he could not possibly, in such a short time, have a ministry that would justify his statement, "It has been made known to all nations."

But another answer is forthcoming from these brethren. They point out that in Eph. 1:4 it says we were chosen in Him "before the foundation of the world." Therefore, they reason, since the mystery of Rom. 16:25 was only kept secret "since the world began" and not "since before the world began" it cannot be the same mystery which is put before us in Ephesians three. This can hardly be considered seriously when one realizes that in Eph. 3:5 it also does not say the mystery was hidden before the foundation of the world. It only says that "in other ages" it was not made known. It is unfair to compare Romans 16:25 with Eph. 1:3 on the basis of a reference to when the world began, for the word "world" is not found in the Greek of Rom. 16:25 any more than it is in Eph. 3:5! The NASB correctly translates it, "-- which has been kept secret for long ages past." Rom. 16:25 and Eph. 3:5 tell the same story -- that this truth, known to God for "long ages past," had never been revealed to others until it was made known through Paul and his writings!

This passage (Rom. 16:25, 26) stands! These verses alone, if believed and given the

weight they deserve, should close all discussion about the age of grace (with its gospel of grace, its mystery program and its one Body) beginning at Acts 28. It simply cannot be so. There must be other, more carefully thought out, solutions to the problems posed in Paul's epistles.

CONCLUSION.

A doctor may be able to cure someone of local infection if he takes the easy way out and just amputates the affected part. But there is a better way, a way which does not leave one a cripple. To brush off the problems observed in the Pre-prison Epistles by amputation (just cutting them off from us dispensationally) leaves us with a mutilated message from our Apostle, and we will be spiritual cripples from the loss. To turn away from truth after truth with the remark, "That is Jewish" will eventually rob us of the Savior who, according to the very last letter Paul wrote, is a "descendent of David" (2 Tim. 2:8 NASB). **He too, is "Jewish"!**

I plead with our sincere and able brethren to turn from this fallacy and use their scholarship to solve the problems, not merely to cut ourselves off from them. There are solutions to them all -- soul satisfying, Christ honoring, Scripturally sound answers. The Acts 28 view does not bring answers -- it just throws away the problems.

--- William P Heath, from the book "Help in Hard Places." (Revised 9/98)

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