

Did the Age of Grace begin at the close of Acts? A brief look at the "Acts 28 position."

In this short study we can do little more than whet the appetite for further investigation, but it is hoped the fallacy of the "Acts 28" position as to when the Body of Christ began may, never-the-less, be demonstrated. ¹

Let us compare what is taught by those holding the Acts 28 view with Paul's own statements.

They teach that when Paul arrived in Rome God gave him a new message to proclaim. In Col. 1:5, 6 **Paul taught** the Colossians that they, and all the world, had already heard the word of truth, had known the grace of God in truth, and had brought forth fruit ever since they first heard the gospel. Notice carefully that it was before Paul arrived at Rome, even before he took his last trip to Jerusalem, that they, and "all the world," had heard this gospel.

They teach that the believer's hope after Acts 28 is not the same hope Paul spoke of before he arrived in Rome. **Paul taught** the Colossians to "**continue** in the faith grounded and settled, and ... **not move away** from the hope of the gospel" which had already been "preached to every creature which is under heaven" (Col. 1:23). The new things he taught in the prison epistles were not a message **replacing** what they had already been taught, but **additional truth to complete it** (Col. 1:24, 25).

They teach that the Lord's table is not for us today. **Paul taught** that it was to be observed "until He come" (1 Cor. 11:26). He has not come -- unless the Rapture took place when Paul arrived in Rome. Of course that did not happen for, if it had, Paul would have been taken out of the world before he had a chance to receive a new program or dispensation or pen the prison epistles (1 Thess. 4:17).

They teach that the Rapture is not our hope. **Paul taught** that at the time of the Rapture the living believers would be changed and caught away to heaven.

* If the Rapture was only the hope of the "body," not the hope of the "joint Body," as the Acts 28 group teach, it should have taken place before Acts 28 -- as the promised conclusion of this "pre-Acts 28 Body" period. It did not happen -- for those believers continued to live out their lives until they died.

* If the Rapture is still future, and the post-Acts 28 believers do not have any part in it, then they must either all die off, or have their own separate "rapture," to get them out of the way before the Rapture of 1 Thess. 4:13 - 18 takes place. If the conclusion of the supposed age of the "joint Body" is the death of the last member, then how do we know it has not already been terminated?

They teach that there are **two** Bodies -- the one of First Corinthians and Romans, and a different one set forth in the prison epistles. **Paul taught** that there is **ONE** Body (Eph. 4:4). ²

* If the Body in the prison epistles is a new and separate Body -- what happened to the

¹For an in depth study of this subject see the book "Help in Hard Places" -- written by W. P. Heath and published by Things to Come Mission in the Philippines.

²Nowhere in Paul's epistles is there even a hint of two Bodies. Such expressions as "first [or second] Body," "new Body," "other Body," or even the plural "Bodies," are not found.

other one? Did it die? Or did it cease to exist? Or does Christ have two Bodies today, with no revealed way of determining which one we are in?

* How are believers placed into the "new Body"? We are told specifically in 1 Cor. 12:13 and Gal. 3:27 how believers were made a part of the "first Body," but there is not a single verse in the prison epistles telling how believers become members of the "second" Body. Col. 2:12 lists some results of our being in the Body, but does not tell us how we are placed there. Eph. 4:6 speaks of the building up of the Body, but does not tell us how to become members of it.

* If only the "joint Body" (Eph. 3:6) is the Body today, then even the Body spoken of elsewhere in the prison epistles is not the Body of Eph. 3:6, for this expression ("joint Body") is found **only in this one verse!**

* If the expression "joint Body" refers to the fact that it is made up of both Jews and Gentiles, then the Body in the pre-prison epistles is also a joint Body, even though this exact terminology is not used (Rom. 12:5; 1 Cor. 12:13 -- and compare Eph. 3:6).

* If the "one baptism" of Eph. 4:5 is the Spirit baptism of 1 Cor. 12:12, then it baptizes believers into the Body referred to in that verse -- the Body which existed before Acts 28. If the "one baptism" in Ephesians is not that of 1 Cor. 12:13, then what baptism is it?

They teach that Acts 28:28 is the great crisis and turning point of the book of Acts, and of Paul's ministry. Then why, **WHY**, are two years of Paul's ministry -- a ministry so important (according to them) that it changed everything for the believers -- described in words which give **NO HINT** of such a change (Acts 28:30, 31)? The Acts 28 people would not describe his prison ministry in the way Luke did in these verses! These final verses of Acts 28 leave ample room for Paul continuing and amplifying what he taught before he arrived in Rome (how very much Ephesians and Colossians "concern the Lord Jesus Christ!"). They give no hint, however, of a disruption of his former program or the adoption of a completely new and different viewpoint in his teaching.

Is it important that we see the fallacy of the Acts 28 view? Indeed it is. Not only does the propagation of this view cause serious division in the churches, it also robs the believer of much important truth. Romans, Galatians, etc. are the very basis upon which Ephesians and Colossians are built. This teaching robs us of the hope of the Rapture, greatly damages the unity of Paul's ministry, and has a strong tendency to introduce a spirit of intellectual pride into Bible study. If you still have problems please find a copy of the Book "Help in Hard Places" and study the chapter on the Acts 28 view diligently, weighing the arguments of both sides against the Word of God.

In preparing the material for "Help in Hard Places," I read carefully through Acts and all of Paul's epistles seeking any real and solid passage proving that the Body of Christ of this age began at Acts 28. I found no such passage. I found, instead, many verses linking Paul's pre-prison ministry very firmly to his prison ministry. The prison epistles are the amplification and completion of revelations begun in mid-Acts, not the introduction of an entirely new program. They are progressive revelation within a dispensation, not a new dispensation.

--- William P. Heath, Bible Study # 48 - B

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(See Bible Study # 48 - A, the full text from book "Help in Hard Places" < bibstudy\acts28.sam >)