

Sunday, August 10, 2008
Living Hope EFC

Art Smith

Acts: The Transitional Nature of the Book.

ILLUS: A Church Plant is a time of much transition.

Much happens during this phase of building a church that doesn't continue once established. Such as:

- Creating a mission statement and core values.
 - A Provisional Leadership Team VS permanent elder leadership.
 - Set-up & take-down each week VS permanent structures.
- And to really understand the personality of a mature church, you need to know about the planting phase.

ACTS: Is a book of great transition in God's administration of dealing with people on planet earth. It serves as a bridge between the Gospels and the Epistles, between economies of "Law" and "Grace."

- **Gospels:** Focus on what Jesus did and taught, & on His death.
- **Acts:** Focuses on what the Holy Spirit continued to do in building Christ's church, because of Christ's words & works.
- **Epistles:** Are the Foundation Truth upon which the church continues to grow into a mature, Holy Temple in which God lives.

Imagine reading the Gospels and turning to the Epistles, without Acts?

- How did we get from Jesus' resurrection in Jerusalem...to Rome?
- What are these "spiritual gifts" Paul talks about? What is a church?
- Where did Paul come from? Who is he? Who is Luke? Mark?
- How & when did the Holy Spirit begin his ministry?
- Why should we have confidence that the Epistles are inspired?

It would be like meeting the core group of 25 people who want to start a church, then coming back 10 years later and seeing a thriving church and not knowing anything about how it got there.

Acts is a book that describes a time of great transition in the new forming Church. It is not doctrinal in nature, but historical.

- A correct understanding of this guards us from misusing it.
- There are patterns and principles that can be helpful to us.
- But some of what happens was meant to be for that transitional period, and is not normative for the entire church age.
- The Epistles are our "Torah" (doctrinal guide) for the church age.

KEY ISSUES WE WILL LOOK AT:

- 1- Understanding the general concept of God's distinct Economies.
- 2- Understanding the major transition God was making in Acts.
- 3- The purpose of the Gift of Miracles in Acts
- 4- The unique ministries of the Baptism & Filling of the Holy Spirit.

1- The general concept of God's distinct Economies.

Simple stated: God works with mankind in distinct/ different ways, during different periods/ phases of history.

ILLUS: Just as a parent would govern his household in different ways, according to varying needs, yet ever for one good end – to bring his children to be happy, mature adults- **so God** has at different times dealt with men in different ways toward one great end – to bring them into His K'dom.

- As kids mature new rules are instituted by parents; old pass away.

PREMISE:

In the **progress of history**, in accordance with the people and circumstances of a given time period, **God gives specific Revelation** and **administers His will** for mankind **in distinct & differing ways**.

EXAMPLES & CHARACTERISTICS of Each Phase:

Adam: Face-to-face. "Keep the garden. Don't eat of the tree." Naked!

Gen.3-Flood: Sin brought death. Driven from Garden. ROM.5:13-14.

Flood to Abr: Govern yourselves – death penalty. Eat meat. Babel.

Abraham: God chose a man/ family to bless all the world. (Gen.26:5)

Law: Deut.28-29. Renewal of the Cov't (Ex.19-Dt.). Life in the Land.

Jesus/ Acts/ Epistles: *Grace*. Where sin abounded, grace much more.

- Acts 2:16 –Last days. Pouring out H.S. 4:12–Salvation only in Him.

Biblical Texts indicating changing administrations of God:

John 1:17; Gal.3:19, 24-25; Heb.1:1-2; Eph.3:2-3, 5-6. Ex.19:3-6.

POINT

Understanding this is essential to proper interpretation of God's Word, and of the events that happen in the book of Acts.

- Some Revelation in each age is carried forward to the other ages.
- Some Revelation is meant only for a limited time & people.
- To apply forward specific promises & regulations given *only* for limited time & environment – creates much confusion.

PROGRESSIVE REVELATION: We recognize that God's message wasn't given all at once in a single day, but over a long time according to the needs of a particular age.

2- The major transition God was making in Acts.
--

The Gospels & Acts are a **transitional period** in God's administration from "Law" to "Grace."

- The coming of Christ, His ministry, death, resurrection, ascension, and the sending of the Holy Spirit – BRIDGE - the O.T. economy of "**Mosaic Law**" with the N.T. economy of "**Grace**."

ACTS serves as a bridge between the Gospels & the Epistles

FROM THE GOSPELS ----- TO THE EPISTLES

1. From an absent Savior - to a present Holy Spirit's ministry (Acts 2).
2. Life without the indwelling Spirit - to life with the indwelling H.S.
3. From Christ's ascension - to His present ministry as Great High Priest.
4. Primary focus upon Israel – now upon "ends of the earth" 1:8.
5. Parochial, national worship code - to worldwide worship code – 15.
6. Messiah dead & raised – to forgiveness of sin & raised with Him.
7. Jewish Priests & sacrifices - to "one Mediator bet/ God & man."
8. Regarding spiritual leaders: From Law appointed from tribe of Levi, to Christ appointed Apostles, to elders (20:28) to Pastor Teachers (Eph.4:11f)

RAMIFICATIONS: This brought about a [Major Challenge](#). How would these Apostles ever be accepted by the church, church-wide – as God’s new representatives of a worldwide movement?

- How would *the Jews* who for 1400 years had been taught about Priesthood in Lev. know to change their allegiance to the Apostles?
- How would a *Gentile* in Ephesus, Corinth or Rome know to accept Peter or Paul as Gods spokesman?

9. New Revelation for a new era in God’s administration with mankind”

- From the O.T. Torah, Wisdom literature, Prophets – to
- Epistles: God’s Revelation of the Mysteries of Christ, and what the accomplishments of the Cross & Resurrection mean to the Church during this age-long wait for His 2nd coming, and for eternity.

CHALLENGE: How would the writings of these new representatives be accepted & identified as *new Revelation* from God for the Church?

ANSWER: 2 Cor.12:12; Heb.2:3-4; Acts 2:22 & 5:12; 14:3
God authenticated His Apostles, as He had His Son!

PRINCIPLE OF TRANSITIONAL PERIODS

Transitional times in God’s economies employ & involve unique features not necessarily normative for the economy they introduce.

EXAMPLE:

Exodus & wilderness Wanderings: involved miracles in Egypt, parting of Sea, water from rock, manna.

Joshua: involved parting Jordan River.

Once In the Land = Miracles weren’t normative.

- When Moses passed off the scene the people had Torah to guide.
- The Law = prescribed what was to be their lifestyle in the land.
- *Gift of Miracles* functioned in later prophets as God gave new Rev/.

POINT: Miracles “accredited” Moses, Joshua, Elijah, Jesus, Apostles as God’s messengers giving New Revelation addressing new times.

APPLICATION:

From 400BC to Jesus’ coming-there were no prophets or miracle gifts.

- Israel went from a lack of God’s presence and power to a great display of both in the Person and Works of Jesus.
- In Acts, Jesus appointed Apostles (prophets) to proclaim the Good News to the world, and authenticated them by the gift of miracles!

- Acts is not teaching that the gift of miracles would be *normative* for other or all spiritual leaders for the duration of the church age.
- Once they passed off the scene (as with Moses) the new Torah, the Epistles, would serve as a lifestyle guide during the church age

CLARIFICATION: To say that the gift of miracles is not normative, is not the same as saying God is not doing miracles as He svnly chooses

POINT:

The gift of miracles had a definite purpose, and was not indiscrim- inately given to many believers in any age of history to function freely.

WHY?

(1) They would be so commonplace that they would no longer signify the giving of new Revelation that mankind must now heed & obey.

(2) Not all gifts are needed throughout a new phase of administration.

- Some are given to build the foundation: Eph.2:20.
- Some are for building the temple of God to maturity: Eph. 4:11-16.
- God sovereignly distributes gifts as needed: 1 Cor.12:11,18.
- Col.2:9; 3:1-17. We have absolutely everything we need!