

NEW!
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God! Where Are You

**What is God really doing
today???**

by Steve Walker

Page 1

ROMANS

An Everyman's Guide

by Steve Walker

Page 6

Breath On Me

A Poem

by Edwin Hatch

Page 14

**Around the Table With
the Pastor.**

Acts

from a message by Jim Kirkwood

Page 15

GOD! WHERE ARE YOU?

Everyone wants to know what God is doing today. After catastrophes like WWII or 9/11, we look to the sky, thrust our fists into the face of God and demand that He give us an account of Himself. We look around, and all we see is sin and its consequences, and we wonder: Where are you, God? Why is there so much hunger and sickness? Why does Children's Memorial keep adding beds? Why the earthly upheavals—earthquakes and fires, tornadoes and tsunamis? Why so much pain and anger? Why God? Where are You? What are You doing?

The philosopher sees this apparent divine unresponsiveness and concludes that God does not exist. "If the Christian God, the God of the Bible, the all-powerful, all-knowing God really existed, He would do away with all this suffering." Wouldn't He? Since He doesn't, either He does not care, or He cares but is not strong enough to do anything about it. Either way He isn't the God of the Bible. That God simply does not exist.

Others cannot rid themselves of God so easily. They see this apparent divine unresponsiveness and become confused and unsure. They do not know what God is doing and assume they never will, at least not in this life. "God may exist, but He is a capricious and unknowable God who moves in mysterious ways that are past finding out...maybe in the bye-and-bye we will understand ...but for now we are pretty much left on our own in the dark." They become "agnostic" in practice, if not in fact. So they go to church, do some religious things and hope for the best.

Then there are those who see this apparent divine unresponsiveness and go to the Bible. They cannot understand it because they do not "rightly divide" it. For them, the Bible

becomes little more than a “devotional book” or a “promise box,” a kind of Christian Ouija board, that they go to once in a while to find something they can use.

If they open to the Old Testament, for instance, they try to claim those things God was doing with Israel in the wilderness or Israel under the Law for themselves. Or if they open to the Gospels or Acts, they try to claim those things God was doing through the earthly ministry of Jesus or the Pentecostal ministry of Peter and the 12—the miracles, the feedings, the healings, the casting out of demons, the speaking in tongues, and so forth.

Before long, however, they begin to realize that God is not really doing these things today either, and trying to recreate them becomes futile. All the wishful thinking on earth won’t change that. With this realization comes disillusionment, disappointment, defeat and despair.

Where exactly then does this leave us? Are we stuck with these three horrible options--atheism? agnosticism? pretend Christianities--tossing them around like circus monkeys trained to juggle three coconuts at once? Or is there another option, a divine alternative?

Christianity has tried over the course of its 2000 year history to provide another option but has been, for the most part, unsuccessful. This is her great problem. This is her great failure. In fact, in her very struggle to find an alternative, she has fallen hard on the rocks, shattering herself into a million pieces of religions and cults, denominations and sects, few of which have been successful in supplying a viable alternative.

MANKIND, WHERE ARE YOU? **The Awesome Option**

Thankfully, though, there is another option. But it will not be found in human philosophy or religion. It can only be found in the Bible, and even there it can only be found if the Bible is “rightly divided.” Rightly dividing God’s Word allows us to understand God’s Way, and doing this will not yield a husky coconut of an option but a genuine pearl of an option. An option of great value, imbued with divine power that changes lives.

To do this, however, we must view things from God’s perspective rather than man’s. Our natural human viewpoint will tell us that successful Christian living occurs when we get God to do what *we want*, and that the goal of Christian living is us getting God involved in *our things*. We think we can accomplish this by engaging in religious rites or by hitting the right buttons in prayer or by doing enough good deeds, and then, after gaining His attention, hold our breath and fancy that He will solve our problems and smooth out the bumps in our lives.

Divine viewpoint, however, tells us something entirely different. It says: “No! This is all wrong!” Successful Christian living is not us getting God to do what we want. It is God empowering us to do what *He wants!* The goal of Christian living is not us getting God involved in our things. It is God getting us involved in *His things!* There is a world of difference between these two viewpoints, and embracing the latter provides the key to finding God’s true alternative to the horrible options.

So how do we find God’s viewpoint? If His ways are not our ways (and they are not), and if His plans and purposes are beyond our ability to discern (and they are), how can we answer such questions? Of course, it would be impossible but for one important exception. It is always impossible for us to know God’s ways and plans EXCEPT in those cases where He has *deliberately and clearly revealed them to us*. When God has done that, He not only *wants* us to know them, He *expects* us to know them.

And this is exactly what He has done through Paul:

If you have heard of the Dispensation of the Grace of God which is given me to you. How that by revelation He made known unto me the Mystery...that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ...to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God (Eph. 3:2-9).

God had devised in eternity past (so to speak) a Purpose whereby He would re-establish His glory in the heavenlies through a Program called the Mystery (Mystery simply means ‘secret’ in the Greek) on behalf of a People called the Church, the Body of Christ. Then, having devised this plan, He hid it away within Himself (not in the Old Testament), keeping it secret through thousands of years of human history, until at the appropriate time He raised up the Apostle Paul, revealed it directly to him and told him to now make it known to the world.

For Paul and his listeners, this revelation was new and unique because they had never heard it before. Where the prophets had spoken previously about God’s purpose to re-establish His glory on the earth, Paul was speaking about God’s purpose to re-establish His glory in the heavenlies. Where the prophets had spoken about things revealed “since the world began (Lk. 1:67-70; Mat. 15:24; Acts 3:18-26),” Paul was speaking about things that had been “kept secret since the world began (Rom. 16:25; Eph. 3).” Where the prophets had spoken previously about Israel and her RISE, Paul was speaking about the Church, the Body of Christ, during the time of Israel’s FALL.

This means we will not find God’s instructions for today in the Old Testament. Nor will we find them in Jesus’ earthly ministry recorded in the Gospels. Nor will we even find them in the ministry of Peter and the 12 recorded in Acts. These ministries, and the portions of the Scriptures associated with them, all have to do with God’s Prophetic Program to establish His glory on earth through Israel’s rise. Paul’s ministry, however, and the portions of Scripture associated with it, all have to do with God’s

Mystery Program to establish His glory in the heavenlies through the Body of Christ in spite of Israel’s fall.

Understanding this fundamental, biblical distinction is the beginning point for engaging in victorious Christian living. This is called “rightly dividing” God’s Word, by which we recognize that different divine programs have different sets of divine instructions. Someone has well said: *While the whole Bible is for us, Paul’s Epistles are written specifically to us and about us.*

If we neglect this distinction and begin our search for what God is doing today by going to the Old Testament, the Gospels or Acts, the end result will always be the same—confusion, doubt, defeat and despair. But if we appreciate it and begin our search by going to Paul’s Epistles, confusion will give way to understanding (God’s viewpoint not ours), doubt will give way to true faith (believing what God has said not our own wishful thinking), and defeat will give way to the victory of joyful Christian living (God’s power not ours).

Some think there is honor in admitting ignorance about what God is doing today. They think it shows a kind of intellectual honesty or a kind of faith-based spirituality. But let’s not fool ourselves. There is no honor in such a thing, and we cannot wear it like a badge on the sleeve of our false modesty. Our ignorance is self-inflicted, and it shows only one thing: We have rebelled against God and rejected His Word.

Our problem is not that God has kept His plans and purposes secret from us. Our problem is that He has clearly revealed them to us, but we refuse to listen! Is it any wonder, then, that having shut out the light of His Word, we now live our lives in darkness? We can dispel that darkness by going to Romans.

EVERYMAN'S GUIDE TO ROMANS

GOD HAS SPOKEN! WILL YOU LISTEN?

Last time we took a panoramic view of the Bible and saw that Paul's writings are distinct. On the one hand, Peter and the 12 in Acts, the Lord Jesus during His earthly ministry in the Gospels, and the prophets in the Old Testament, all had to do with a divine plan that God had spoken of since the world began, whereby Gentiles would be blessed through the rise of Israel on the earth. Paul, on the other hand, has to do with a divine plan that God had kept secret since the world began, whereby Gentiles would be blessed in spite of Israel's fall, through the Body of Christ, in the heavenlies. (see GIYJ; Winter Issue; 2007; for a full explanation).

Only when we appreciate this most fundamental biblical distinction can we begin to understand what God is doing today. The victorious Christian life will not come by trying to reinvent Pentecost or by trying to reclaim the kingdom blessings of the Gospels or by trying to follow Israel in the Old Testament. It will come only by recognizing what God has involved us in today, which is found in Paul's Epistles, beginning in Romans.

1 Paul, a bondservant of Jesus Christ, called *to be* an apostle, separated unto the gospel of God 2 which He promised before through His prophets in the Holy Scriptures, 3 concerning His Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who was born of the seed of David according to the flesh, 4 and declared *to be* the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead. 5 Through Him we have received grace and apostleship for obedience to the faith among all nations for His name, 6 among whom you also are the called of Jesus Christ; 7 To all who are in

Rome, beloved of God, called *to be* saints:

A NEW AND UNIQUE APOSTLE

Paul, a bondservant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated unto the gospel of God...

The first thing we must recognize if we are going to understand what God is doing today is that it required the raising up of a new and unique apostle, the Apostle Paul. Remember, at the time God already had 12 perfectly good, able-bodied apostles-- Peter and the 12. So, why Paul? This is the million dollar question of biblical Christianity. How we answer it determines everything. For if we go wrong here, we go wrong everywhere. But if we get this right, we enter upon the journey called: Victorious Christian Living.

Some try to explain Paul's appearance by denigrating the integrity of the 12. The gentler of these critics say Peter and the 12 did not understand what they were supposed to be doing so God had to raise up the more sophisticated Paul. Other, harsher critics, go further, saying God had to raise up Paul because Peter and the 12 were disobedient. They were bigoted and prejudiced Jews who refused to obey God's command to go out to the Gentiles. But it is the critics who are the ignorant, not Peter and the 12, and what they say comes from gentile arrogance, not divine instruction.

While beyond the scope of this paper (see the www.godinvitesyou.com website), suffice it here to say that Peter and the 12 knew exactly what they were doing. Even a cursory skimming of the beginning of Acts shows that they operated under the control of the Holy Spirit and were in complete accord with God's revelation to them, which provided only one way for Gentiles to receive God's blessings, and that was through Israel and her RISE.

That is why Peter started and, for the most part, stayed in Jerusalem and Israel. He was not disobeying God. Rather he was operating in accord with what God had revealed to him and the prophets before him. According to that revelation, Jerusalem (Israel's leaders) needed to be converted and saved FIRST. Once Jerusalem had been converted and saved, then she would carry God's blessings out to all Israel. Once all Israel had been converted and saved, then all Israel would carry God's blessings out to the whole world.

That was the order. That was the way it was supposed to work. Israel was God's divinely appointed conduit for dispensing His blessings to the world. Apart from her, no other conduit had ever been revealed. God's instructions to Peter were for him to go and stay in Jerusalem until she had received Christ and was converted. Then he would use her to go out and convert all Israel. And then he would use all Israel to go out and convert the world. Those were Peter's instructions, and he followed them to the letter.

But then the unthinkable happened. Jerusalem and Israel rejected Christ as her Messiah and refused to participate in God's program for her. Therefore, God set unbelieving Israel temporarily aside. When He did this, Israel's program diminished and eventually disappeared. So did the ministry of Peter and the 12, who, by the middle of Acts, almost completely exit the scene.

Acts, therefore, is a not a book that is not primarily describing the beginning of the Church, the Body of Christ--contrary to conventional wisdom. Primarily, it is the record of the fall and diminishing of Israel and God's program for her. Peter and the 12 had obeyed God faithfully and had done all they could to advance God's program for Israel, but Israel would not have it. As a result, God ceased dealing with her, putting her program as His conduit for Gentile blessings on hold.

At this point there was no hope for the world. God's nation Israel had fallen and could not be used to carry His blessings out to

the world. Without her, there was no other way for God to bless the world. Without the revelation of a new program, the world was (as Paul explains in Eph. 2) without hope and without God.

But then, God did something amazing. Something He had never revealed before. Something Peter knew nothing about. He began a new program through which He could bless Gentiles apart from Israel and in spite of her fall, and Paul is the one God appointed to proclaim it.

A NEW AND UNIQUE APOSTLE: BUT THE SAME LORD

...which He promised before through His prophets in the Holy Scriptures, concerning his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who was born of the seed of David according to the flesh, and declared to be the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead...

Before continuing to explain this new and unique revelation from God, Paul first wants to make sure that there is no confusion about the way in which his revelation is "new and unique." Paul wants to make sure everyone understands that while his apostleship is new and unique, the Person it "concerns" is not. Paul's apostleship "concerns" the same Person that the prophet's ministries had always been "concerned" with--the Lord Jesus Christ. God's dealings with mankind have always centered on Him (Heb. 10:7)—all from way Gen. 1:1 through Rev. 22:21. Paul's revelation was no exception!

The same Lord the Davidic Covenant (the heart of Israel's program) was "concerned" with is the same Lord Paul's revelation was "concerned" with. The same Lord who will fulfill all that God promised to Israel through the prophets is the same Lord who will fulfill all that Paul was speaking about. The same LORD God of

the Old Testament, who was declared the all-powerful God the Son by His holy and glorious resurrection from the dead, is the same Lord, God the Son, who died and rose again according to what Paul said.

Now if Paul's sentence ended here, at verse 4, we might be excused for thinking that Paul was merely one in a long line of prophets, continuing in the tradition of Peter and the 12 in Acts, Jesus in the Gospels, and the prophets in the Old Testament. But it does not end here. It continues all the way down to v. 8, and when taken as a whole, it is, without exaggeration, the most important sentence ever spoken in the last 2000 years. So let's keep reading.

A NEW AND UNIQUE MESSAGE FOR A NEW AND UNIQUE PEOPLE

Through Him we have received grace and apostleship for obedience to the faith among all nations for His name, among whom you also are the called of Jesus Christ; To all who are in Rome, beloved of God, called to be saints:

If you can read these verses and yawn, you do not really understand them. The first eight verses in the Book of Romans turned the 1st century world upside-down and inside-out; they ought to do the same to ours. If the first four comforted his readers, the next four knocked them from their chairs. It is as though Paul with verses 1-4 lobbed a slow ball over the plate by anchoring his ministry to the same Lord that the prophets before him had anchored theirs to. Then, with the next four, he shocked the crowd by throwing a stunning 100 m.p.h. fast ball by proclaiming that the content of his apostleship was, however, completely new and absolutely unique. Something the prophets had never spoken about before.

You see, according to Peter and the prophets, the next thing that was supposed to happen was for Christ to return to this rebellious world and judge it in wrath, ushering in a time of blood and fire, cleansing it of all His enemies, and establishing the long prophesied Kingdom of Israel with Christ sitting on David's throne in Jerusalem. Having accomplished this, sin and its consequences would be banished, and the righteousness and knowledge of God would cover the earth "as the waters cover the sea."

That is what was supposed to happen. That is what Peter said would happen (Acts 2-3). That is what Jesus said in His earthly ministry would happen (Mat. 24-25). That is what all the prophets of the Old Testament said would happen (Is. 59-61). And that is what Paul's audience expected him to say would happen as well.

But he did not say this. He did not say anything like it. In fact, he said something that was very nearly the exact opposite of it. Paul said that while God would have been perfectly right and just to do what all the prophets before him had spoken about, He didn't. Instead of completing His program with Israel the way the prophets had said, He temporarily set it aside and introduced a new program that had never been known before.

Instead of ushering in the prophetic "Terrible Day of the LORD," He ushered in an unprophesied "Wonderful Day of Salvation." Instead of ushering in the prophetic interlude of wrath and judgment, He ushered in a glorious interlude of grace and peace. God chose Paul to explain how and why.

Since God had never revealed this plan before, it required a new revelation. A revelation that He had kept hidden, not within the Old Testament, but within Himself (Eph. 3). Paul calls this the **Preaching of Jesus Christ According to the Revelation of the Mystery**, which had been kept secret since the world began (Rom. 16:25).

This is what God is doing today! He is holding back His judgment and wrath a little while longer so that the world of lost sinners, sinners like ME and sinners like YOU, can have more time to respond positively to Him and His Word and believe on Him!

HUMAN OR DIVINE VIEWPOINT?

Too often we think we are smarter than God. If only we could run the universe we would do this, that or the other thing and fix it all up. We would instruct God to do away with evil right now! We would tell Him to do away with sin and its consequences—immediately! But we had better be careful because we might just get what we ask for.

You see, for God to cleanse the world of sin and its consequences, He would have to come back and deal with sinners! If you are an unbeliever and think you would like this, be careful because this means that God would have to come back in His wrath and deal WITH YOU! And if you are a believer and think you would like this, you need to be careful too because this means He would have to come back in wrath and deal with your unsaved family, friends, loved ones, co-workers and neighbors.

God, however, says, “NO! I know better.” I will give them more time to respond positively to Me. I desire that everyone get saved, so I will keep on extending my longsuffering to the very last moment possible, holding back my wrath and judgment until every one has had countless opportunities to believe Me. No one will be able to accuse God of acting rashly or judging unfairly. All He will have to do is point to this Dispensation of Grace where in infinite mercy He extended His grace freely to all, saving all those who believe.

Our job today, then, is not to wish to cut this merciful extension of God’s grace short. Our job is to participate in it and advance it as long as God chooses to extend it. Who are we to desire to cut short the longsuffering of God on behalf of God-rejecting sinners? Only He knows how long this Dispensation of Grace must last. Our job is to make the most of it, “redeeming the time because the days are evil” (Eph. 5:16).

GOD's Will For Your Life!

Do you want to know what God’s will for your life is? I know what God’s will is for my life, and I can tell you exactly what His will is for your life. This may sound bold, and even arrogant on my part, but I will do it anyway. When we go solely to the Bible “rightly divided,” in light of Paul’s revelation about what God is doing today, His will becomes crystal clear. Here it is:

1. If you are an unbeliever, God’s will for your life is very simple indeed. God wants you to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and be saved. He died for your sins and rose again in perfect righteousness so that He might give you eternal life as a free gift. Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and be saved.
2. If you are a believer, God’s will for you life is just as simple. Do not make it any more complicated than this! You do not need to put out a fleece. You do not need to try to read your circumstances like a soothsayer reads tea leaves. You do not need to try to piece together mysterious signs, hoping you have somehow deciphered God’s will for your life.

Put all of that superstitious nonsense away. God’s will is simple and clear. His will for me and for you is for us to do the same thing today that He is doing. Today, He is dispensing His love, grace, peace and mercy to an undeserving, sin-cursed and rebellious world. That is what He wants us to do as well. When we take the grace and peace that God has freely given to us as

believers and share it freely with others, even, no especially, in the midst of adverse circumstances, we are experiencing victorious Christian living because we are doing the will of God.

When this happens God's power is released. Paul tells us that God's "grace is sufficient for you" for His strength is "made perfect in weakness." You do not have to wait even one more second. Go and serve the Lord wherever you are. Are you a hungry believer? Become an expert at dispensing God's grace in the midst of hunger. Are you believer with poor health? Become an expert at dispensing God's grace in the midst of illness. Are you a believer with good health? Become an expert at dispensing God's grace in the midst of healthiness. . Are you a rich believer? Become an expert at dispensing God's grace in the midst of riches. Are you an old believer? Become an expert at dispensing God's grace in the midst of old age. Are you a young believer? Become an expert at dispensing God's grace in the midst of youthfulness. Are you a poor believer? Become an expert at dispensing God's grace in the midst of poverty.

You can start right now! Wherever you are, and in whatever circumstances you find yourself. You do not need to wait for any thing more. God has already done it all at the Cross where Christ put His love on display so that He could overflow the world with His grace and peace. Jesus Christ did this under the adverse conditions of the cross. Our service now also occurs under adverse conditions.

**Breathe on me, Breath of God;
Fill me with life anew,
That I may love what Thou dost love,
And do what Thou wouldst do.**

A ROUND THE TABLE WITH THE PASTOR



from a message by Pastor Jim Kirkwood

GOD'S WORD IS PRACTICAL

This Bible study is dedicated to that one person in ten who thinks. God always meets us in the realm of the intellect, never in the realm of the emotions. As important as the emotions are (and I wouldn't give you a nickel for someone who was without them because emotions play an important role in our lives), emotions must be the caboose of the train of life while Bible doctrine driving the mind must be the engine. God's Word is to instruct the mind, the mind in turn instructs the will and this decides the emotions.

We had a lady come to our Bible study once, and she said, "Before I attended this Bible study and began to grasp the grace message of the Risen Christ, I had frequent depression. My only question was when will I get out of it, and how long will it go on. I never knew I could will myself out of depression. I always saw myself as a victim of my own emotions. I didn't control my emotions, they controlled me." But by studying the Word of God she discovered that emotions are meant to be servants not masters, and that she could dictate her emotions.

Emotions really are a choice, and as this woman began to meet God in the Bible in the arena of the intellect, and as she allowed doctrine to instruct her mental grasp, and as she permitted this mental grasp to furnish the necessary information to her volition or will, she discovered that she could purpose and choose her own emotions.

THE BOOK OF ACTS AND DR. LUKE

Today we get into a very exciting book although a much misunderstood one—The Book of Acts. Acts was written by a medical doctor, an historian, an adventurer, an author and more. His name is Dr. Luke, and he begins this book saying, “The former treatise have I made Oh Theophilus of all that Jesus began both to do and teach.” Now many Bible teachers believe Luke was a Gentile where so many of the other writers of the Scriptures were Jews. They believe this because he is listed with Gentiles in Colossians by the Apostle Paul.

I am not sure that this is true, but at any rate he is writing to someone with a Gentile name. We must remember that many Gentiles had Jewish names because they were influenced by Judaism in the Greco-Roman world of Luke’s day. And many Jews had Gentile names because they lived in the Gentile world. For the Jew it may have been convenient to use their Jewish name at home and a Gentile name out in the world.

GOD’S WORD DOES NOT CONFUSE: IT ENLIGHTENS!

The Book of Acts should bring enlightenment. God’s Word can do this because it is not subject to interpretation. God’s Word makes the claim for itself that it can make the simple one wise. If it were subject to our interpretation, it could not do this. If the meaning of any Scripture is up for grabs, then that Scripture can only bring darkness not light. So as we approach the study of this book, let’s remember some principles:

All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.
(II Tim. 3:16-17)

Isn’t that wonderful? Every Scripture is God-breathed and profitable. In what way? It is profitable for doctrine. That is why I say so often that doctrine is the stuff that life is made of. Our Lord in His earthly ministry said man shall live by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God. So we need the whole Bible Genesis 1:1 through Revelation 22:21. We cannot afford to leave any of it out because it is all profitable.

And yet we must recognize that there are many messages in the Bible. God in the Bible speaks to many individuals and to many groups. You would not want to take what He says about Satan and understand it to be about Christ. Christ and Satan are at opposite ends of the spectrum of holiness. You would not want to take what He says to demons and apply it to unfallen angels. One of the keys to understanding Acts (and for that matter the whole Word of God) is to observe who is being addressed. Otherwise, the result will be confusion rather than clarity.

SO WHY DOES ACTS BRING SO MUCH CONFUSION?

A dear lady once told me that she never gets into the book of Acts because it confuses her. Now if we fail to observe some of the keys to Bible understanding, we can come out of the Book of Acts very confused indeed. The dear prince of Bible expositors, who led my wife to the Lord, says in his lectures on Acts that there is a pattern here for Christian missionary enterprise. But the problem is that the pattern keeps changing. And a pattern that keeps changing is no pattern at all. Page after page in Acts everything keeps changing. So that does not work.

The traditional way of teaching the Book of Acts says it is the story of the birth of the Body of Christ. A Bible teacher in

California has written a commentary on the first 12 chapters of Acts, and he called his commentary The Birth of the Body. But I want to suggest something. That this is an error, and we will see why as we continue our study. You see, errors are frequently held by dear, God-loving people. But an error does not become a truth because it is widely held or held by accredited people or by people we like. An error is always an error. It doesn't get better with age, and it doesn't turn into truth upon repetition, or when it is popularly supported, or when it is widely held or frequently taught.

So here is one of those keys for your thoughtful consideration. Acts is not primarily the story of the birth of the Body, although the Body of Christ is certainly born in the Book of Acts. Rather it is essentially the story of the demise of Israel. It is essentially the story of Israel being literally offered a kingdom on earth that would be presided over by the Lord Jesus Christ. Israel, however, refused that Kingdom. Acts is the story of God withdrawing the offer of that Kingdom and of Israel temporarily losing her place as God's favored nation. If we keep that in mind, that will clarify so much in the Book of Acts. They will lend clarity to our understanding of the doctrine of salvation and the doctrine of the Christian life and ministry.

A PERSONAL APPEAL

Earlier we quoted from II Tim. 3:16-17 where in the Greek it literally says that every Scripture is God-breathed and profitable for doctrine and for reproof and for instruction. This means there has to come a change in our thinking. How much of what you believe and what I believe is the result of conviction arising out of earnest, honest Bible study? And how much is simply bequeathed to us by our family or our denomination or our favorite TV evangelist or our favorite radio Bible teacher or our favorite author?

Take the Psalmist, for instance. He found the words of God and valued them more than thousands of pieces of gold and

silver. That could be millions of dollars. Do you, dear reader, and do I treasure God's Word like the Psalmist does? The Psalmist is saying that the word of God, once we understand it, is something that eclipses all material wealth. Do we believe that?

For this reason, the Book of Acts is precious and profitable. It is God-breathed. Although Luke is its human author, God is its divine author. The first way it is going to be profitable for doctrine is for producing conviction in our thinking. If we come to the word of God as Moses came to the burning bush, with our spiritual shoes off, and if we let God speak, and if we let every man be a liar and let God be our sole authority, and let the Bible be His only vicar of Christ on earth, the first thing that is going to happen is a change in our thinking. That is what reproof means.

But there is a second thing it will do. It is not only profitable for reproof, it is also profitable for correction. We are not only going to be convicted and reproofed of the views we hold that are wrong! We are also going to be instructed in what is right! It is one thing to be proved wrong, it is another to be furnished with what is right to take the place of the wrong information. It took me over 20 years to learn to love getting punched in the nose by Scripture. If the Scripture is written to profit and reprove Jim Kirkwood, and correct him, then I ought to come to a place where I delight in finding out I am wrong somewhere. I should delight in God replacing my errant human philosophy with His pure divine theology.

So beware as we enter the Book of Acts. As the Word of God it is going to rattle our chains, shake our cages and rock our boats, and I hope we can learn to like that. Some people, of course, do not like this. When immature people get shocked by the Bible they stop learning. When mature people get shocked they study even harder.

We need instruction. The Scripture says It is not in man who walks to direct his steps. That is why human history is chaos.

That is why human history is written in blood and tears. That is why human history is the story of man taking advantage of man, murdering senior citizens and women and babies. Carrying out wars in which millions are tortured, imprisoned and killed. It is the story of concentration camps and slave labor camps and burglars and home invaders and rapists and child molesters. It is not in man who walks to direct his steps.

The more we try to fix the human situation, the more broken it is observed to be. So we have to come to the Author. We have to come to the Creator. We have to come to the only One in the universe who has all the wisdom there could possible be. Who knows everything—past, present and future—actual and potential—and allow Him to be our ultimate Bible teacher. I promise you that if you stay with the Acts Bible study, you will learn some things, and you won't have to take my word for it, you will see them clearly in Scripture for yourself. Some things that are almost never taught today. But remember when God reproves us and corrects us and instructs us, it is always for our profit.

One of the first things we want to learn in the very first chapter of Acts is that there was never an election carried out. Now if the Chicago city council looked through its lists and found only 2 people qualified to be mayor and instead of voting on it got down on their knees and said Lord which of these 2 have you previously chosen to be mayor we would immediately say Hey, that is not an election. What are they pulling? That is exactly what happened with the 120 in the first chapter of Acts. There is no election in the first chapter of Acts and next time we will see why it is so and why it is so important.

God Invites You Journal is dedicated to preaching the Gospel of Grace in the context of the Mystery program revealed to and through the Apostle Paul by the Risen Lord Jesus Christ. Scripture says this about Paul's distinct and unique ministry:

Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ; and to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God..."

(Eph. 3:8-9).

This is what removes confusion and contradictions from the Bible. This is what explains what God is doing today. This is what God wants us to be involved in today, granting to us the privilege of participating in things of infinite and eternal value.

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