

THRU THE BIBLE SYNTHESIS
"Part XL: Acts - Filling The Believer's Spiritual Edification Vacuum"

Introduction: (To show the need . . .)

In a recent Board Meeting, one of our deacons expressed his dismay at the problems existing in area wide Evangelical churches. His concerns are valid not only in our area, but nationwide. Consider:

- (a) One Gospel-preaching church near us is so heavily in debt that its entire ministry is focused on getting people to give to make payments on its new and expansive facility. It leaves its people with the impression that they should tithe 90% of their income!
- (b) A member of a Gospel-preaching church in our area called my home one night wondering what our church believed, and what went on here. He is happy in his current church, but the denomination of the Church has recently voted to approve of Gay marriages. He loves his home church, but he doesn't want to have some of his offerings going to the denomination, and is in a quandary!
- (c) More than one Gospel-preaching church in our area has a sizable group of members in it who believe in soul sleep at death!
- (d) An allegedly Christian woman who picked up a book in a local Christian bookstore read that she could be godly and Lesbian; she thus left her husband to live in a Lesbian relationship with another woman!
- (e) I recently counseled with a Christian who got involved in fortune tellers ads on television. After paying her money, she had an unsettling experience with an evil spirit in her home, and I counseled her to get out of the fortune teller commitment and trust the Lord. That stopped the appearance of the evil spirit in her room!
- (f) One national Evangelical leader says churches should hire homosexuals who are oriented as Gays but who don't practice it!
- (g) Quentin Schultze writes in the March/April, 1996 Moody Monthly that a false rumor, started by Evangelicals, has spread about Madalyn Murray O'Hair. The rumor is that she petitioned the FCC to stop religious broadcasting, a completely unfounded idea! Nevertheless, this rumor still circulates at the cost a lot of money of American taxpayers, for the FCC must process all of the objections that Evangelicals have registered over the matter with the FCC!

What is going on in such situations?! Why are people getting confused, misled and hurt?!

(We turn to the sermon's "Need" section . . .)

Need: "When I accepted Christ as my Savior, I found real fulfillment! But after this blessing has come many spiritual trials in my own life and in the lives of other believers I know: divisions, confusion, deep hurts with precious little sense of direction -- WHY all of this, and WHAT needs to change? What's going ON?!"

- I. **Due to the angelic conflict, there arose a threat to human fulfillment after Israel's failure to check world apostasy:**
 - A. Though God created the world and set man up in **wholesomeness** as His deputy on earth, sin deposed him, ruining his utopia, and Satan became earth's **ruler** bent on man's **destruction**, Gn. 1-5; 2 Cor. 4:4.
 - B. The Lord renewed history through the Noahic flood, Gen. 6:1-9:7.
 - C. Yet, Noah's descendant, Nimrod, began an **apostasy** opposing **God's rule** on the earth, Gn. 10:8-11; 11:1-9; Rv. 12:1-3.
 - D. God chose Abraham to start a **NATION** to **check** his sin, Gn. 12:1-3.
 - E. Yet, the Old Testament records not only that nation, Israel's repeated failure to curb Nimrod's error, but her tendency to be corrupted by it in spite of God's discipline to the contrary, Gn. 12:4-Malachi.
 - F. In fact, when God sent Israel's long-anticipated Messiah to install His Kingdom to **overcome** Satan's **RULE**, Israel's sin moved her to reject Him, so God **postponed** that Kingdom's **installation**, Matthew - John.
 - G. With God **postponing** discipling people through **Israel**, (Mtt. 12-13), He **meanwhile** needed to shepherd individuals away from Satan's **destructive** rule to Christ's **reign** so they could enjoy His **protection**!
- II. **Christ thus created the CHURCH as the means of shepherding people to come under HIS RULE for blessing in this era (Acts).**
 - A. Acts 1:1 shows that what Jesus **BEGAN** doing to promote His Kingdom on **earth** He **continues NOW**, B.K.C., N.T., p. 351, 353.
 - B. Just **how** Jesus **promotes** His Kingdom today Luke records in Acts:
 - 1. Just before **leaving earth**, (Acts 1:6), Jesus told His apostles that they would not know His Kingdom's installation **time**, but that they **would** be its **recruiters**, Acts 1:8 (Ibid., p. 351).
 - 2. Thus, Acts **illustrates** that **recruitment plan**: it **starts** in Jerusalem (ch. 1-7), reaches to Judea **and** Samaria (ch. 8-12) and **finally** to the ends of the earth (chs. 13-28)!

C. **The existence of new recruits still living in Satan's hostile domain led to Christ's organizing the CHURCH for their blessing:**

1. **Individual** believers since Pentecost, Jew **and** Gentile, though part of God's Kingdom are however as an assembly **DISTINCT FROM** the **nation** of Israel, Acts 15:13-20; Ephesians 2:11-18!
2. As **Christ** must have the **preeminence** in **these** believers for Him to bless them by **shielding** them from **Satan's** reign while they are in his domain, (Col. 1:18; Ep. 1:20-23), they have to be **shepherded** under **DIRECT SPIRITUAL RULE** by **CHRIST!**
3. **To DO this in His BODILY absence, CHRIST used the Holy Spirit to shepherd these believers THROUGH the apostles teaching (2:42a) which overflowed to direct their GROUP fellowship and worship as His CHURCH, Acts 2:42-47; 13:1-2.**
4. God **then spread out** that **CHURCH** to form **LOCAL churches**, a move we now call **MISSIONS** (Acts 8:4; 13:2-3; 1 Tim. 3:14-15; Tit. 1:5) and **delegated** Christ's shepherding Word to be **Biblically qualified Bible teaching** (Acts 6:1-7; 1 Tim. 4:12-16; Rev. 2-3)
5. **Thus, Acts with the Pastoral Epistles comprise God's order for local churches to bring Kingdom subjects under Christ's RULE so He can PROTECT them and EDIFY them as they live in Satan's hostile domain!** (cf. Rev. 2-3)

III. **Acts contributes to the "thread of redemption" by the news that though Israel's Kingdom is delayed, Christ is ably shepherding individual Kingdom subjects via His CHURCH for their blessing!**

Application: *To get our bearings, have our needs met and avoid inner hurts, (1) after believing in Christ for salvation from sin (Jn. 3:16), (2) join a **BIBLICAL local church** (a) where the BIBLE'S truth is taught and practiced, and (b) attend and (c) apply its ((a)) teaching (b)) and leadership's guidance so that (d) our lives flow with CHRIST'S blessing! (3) If anyone hurts, something has broken down in the USE of the BIBLICAL local church in that believer's life so that he is missing CHRIST'S shepherding, and he is defeated in the angelic conflict! (4) As Christ is sovereign over His Church UNIVERSAL, be assured that ANY hurting believer will EVENTUALLY "come around" to proper alignment to Christ, one way or another, Rom. 8:28- 30! (5) Yet, as a PREVENTATIVE measure, we can sidestep much trouble by getting properly aligned to Christ under the ministry of a Biblical local church right NOW!*

Lesson: *The vacuum of shepherding people in Satan's hostile world left by God's ministry change from using Israel is filled by Christ's **DIRECT shepherding through Biblical local churches!***

Conclusion: (To illustrate the message . . .)

To show how real is Christ's ministry to fulfill people **today** through instrumentality of the **local church**, consider the following testimony of a formerly demon-possessed mental health professional, Sharon Beekmann: (Moody Monthly, March/April, 1996, p. 96)

"By 1985 I had difficulty completing thoughts, lacked emotion, and lived in isolation. I was a poor reflection of the vibrant, successful mental health professional I once had been.

I decided to stop channeling. It was then the spirits revealed their true nature . . . The spirits attacked more viciously when I was hungry or tired . . . **The problem had started in 1977, when I began exploring the psychic phenomena realm . . .**

In the spring of 1987 . . . (a) I called an inner city church. 'I'm demon-possessed,' I said, 'and would like to (b) know Jesus Christ. Could someone there help me?' Without hesitating, the church secretary said, 'Yes, we have an associate pastor, David Stark, who would love to talk with you. Come right down!'

After introductions, the young pastor and a woman from the congregation bowed their heads and prayed . . . As he (then) described God's love for me, the spirits screamed objections in my mind. But I knew they lied. 'What do I need to?' I asked . . .

Eagerly I prayed aloud, 'Lord Jesus Christ, I confess that I have sinned against you. Please forgive me. I want You to be Lord and Savior of my life. Amen.' As they continued praying, I felt the Spirit of God fill the cold place at my center . . .

(c) Every week for the next year, (d) I attended church services, (e) participated in a Bible study, and (f) prayed with the pastor and a lay minister. (g) I also emptied my house of all paraphernalia associated with the occult and New Age thinking. As I prayed, worshipped and filled my mind with biblical truth, I sensed God healing me from the inside . . ."

We would do well to follow her example for our own protection and edification!