

Episode #1046 The Flow of Truth Part 7-The Character of the Acts Period

I. All truth flows out of the Old Testament into the gospels. It flows out of the gospels into the book of Acts. It flows out of the book of Acts into Paul's final epistles. That is the flow of truth. We are studying this flow and how it can teach us about God's work with us today and how it differs from His work with others in the past and future.

II. The Character of the Acts Period.

- A. We began our study with the period of the earthly life of Christ, and now we are getting into the period we call the Acts period.
- B. It has long been the purpose of most theologians to minimize, depreciate, and stultify the truth concerning the work God was doing in the Acts period. This has been done both wittingly and unwittingly. The actual history of this time has been rewritten by commentators on Acts. The book of Acts is commonly believed to be the beginning of something new: a new religion, the church, Christendom. It is claimed that the continuation of Acts is today. Yet a realistic assessment of Acts reveals that this is not the case.
- C. Acts was the continuation of all that the Lord Jesus began to do during His earthly ministry, Acts 1:1. It was the completion of a work, not the beginning of one. It was very different from God's work today.
- D. The great theological conspiracy is to get the Jew out and get the Gentile or the church in. We contend Acts is focused on the people of Israel.
- E. The book of Acts presents the earliest stage of the kingdom of God on earth. God's kingdom was spreading throughout the Israelite world, and it was very different in character from what we experience today.
- F. After years of study of the Acts period, I have tried to saturate myself with the life and spirit of that time. My studies have brought the conviction that certain, great truths related to that period stand out like mountain peaks, and need to be recognized by all who would deal honestly with the book of Acts and the epistles written during that period.
- G. Otis Q. Sellers contended that there are certain great truths regarding the Acts period that stand out like mountain peaks, and that without an understanding of these truths we will never understand the Acts period. These truths he set forth in 23 propositions in his TL020 – The Flow of Truth Part 4. We will examine these 23 propositions today. These propositions come from a number of sources.
 1. The words spoken by our Lord Jesus Christ after his resurrection and as recorded in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.
 2. The book of Acts and its history of a 33-year period.
 3. Paul's epistles written during this period: Galatians, I and II Thessalonians, I and II Corinthians, and Romans.
 4. Hebrews, a record of things proclaimed to the Hebrews during Acts.
- H. Upon this material, these sources, nothing else, that I base these 23 propositions. Not church history. Not church fathers.

III. Twenty-three propositions regarding Acts.

1. The 120 disciples assembled at Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost were Jews who believed that Jesus of Nazareth was the Messiah (the Christ) and the Son of God. This had been revealed to them by the Father in heaven. Flesh and blood, no accident of

birth, the fact that they were part of a favored nation, had not revealed this to them. That Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, had been revealed to these 120 by the Father in heaven. These 120 were part of the personal ministry of Jesus Christ. It was not a matter of Christ winning one and that one going out and winning two and those two going out and winning four. No. Throughout the 3 years that Jesus Christ ministered on earth, He was the only One Who could speak the Word in such a way that God would use it and reveal to men that He was Christ, the Son of God. These 120 were the results of the personal ministry of Jesus Christ, Whose words led them to believe that He was their long-awaited messiah. These men did not cease to be Jews because of their belief. That is very important to remember. These men were Jews who believed, and they did not cease to be Jews because of their belief. Sir Robert Andersen has well said in his book *The Silence of God*, page 85, "The Divine religion of Judaism, in every part of it, both in the spirit and the letter, pointed to the coming of a promised Messiah, and to maintain that a man ceased to be a Jew because he cherished that hope and accepted the Messiah when He came, this is a position absolutely grotesque in its absurdity." Yes, the 120 were Jews who believed, and they continued to be Jews who had found Jesus Christ to be their Messiah, and these were the ones who assembled on the day of Pentecost.

2. Those who heard the word on that memorable day were Jews, devout men out of every nation under heaven. They had been of the diaspora, but they had returned to the land. The 3000 who out of those who became believers were without exception Jews, devout men. They were Jews, devout men, before they believed, and they were Jews, devout men, after they believed. There has never been anything at all about believing in on the Lord Jesus Christ that would cause a man cease to be a Jew and to become a Gentile. The 120 were Jews, and the 3000 who believed were Jews, and remained as such, Jews who believed.
3. The salvation-bringing message of God was authorized to every man in Israel from the day of Pentecost onward. Up to this time, men could not even tell that Jesus was the Christ. The marvelous vision that Peter, James, and John saw, Matthew 17:9, He said, "Tell the vision to no one until the Son of Man is risen from the dead." He charged these men with severity that they should tell no man that He was Jesus, the Christ. That was a salvation-bringing message, a life-bringing message. They were not authorized, nor was anyone else authorized, to preach this. The salvation-bringing message of God was authorized to every man in Israel from the day of Pentecost onward. This message always centered in the fact that the Man Jesus, Who appeared to be just a man, was in reality the Messiah, that is, the Christ the Son of God. This One was presented as an object of faith and offered to Israel as a Savior, and forgiveness of sins was promised to all who believed in Him. This salvation-bringing message could be spoken by any believing Israelite who was commissioned by God to do so. This commission always consisted of the word of God coming to him as a message intended for others. For example, Luke 3:2. When the word of God comes to a man, that is his commission to speak it to others. We have the word of God in the Bible. It does not come to us. We are not mediators between God and men. We come to the Bible to find God's truth. But in both the gospel period and in the Acts period, as we see in the case of John the Baptist, when the word of God came to John, that was his commission to speak it to others. In the Acts period, any believing Israelite

- could preach the gospel to others, and that commission consisted of the word of God coming to him as a message intended for others. It seems to me that every believing Jew in the Acts period had the blessing of this experience. It may have come to them for only one person. But there could be no proclamation of Christ in the Acts period without a Divine message coming to you, not out of the Bible but coming from God, to be presented to others. It may have been intended for one; it may have been intended for ten, or sometimes like with Paul for a great multitude, but there could be no proclamation of Christ in the Acts period without the word of God coming to you, as there was no other way to get it. There was no school that taught it, and it was not written in the Acts period.
4. For 8 years between Pentecost and Peter's visit to the house of Cornelius, Acts 2 to Acts 10, every believer was a Jew, that is, a man of Israel. No man between Acts 2 and 10 was authorized to speak the salvation-bringing message to anyone else. Even if a Gentile was standing on the edge of a crowd and overheard a message, still it was not to him. The Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8 was a convert, a proselyte to the Jewish religion, and has to be considered as a Jew. You will see that for yourself if you look at Acts 8. That man had been to Jerusalem to worship, and he was a proselyte, and he has to be considered as a Jew.
 5. The thrice-repeated vision Peter saw on the housetop was a special commission, a special authorization, a special direction for him to go to the house of Cornelius, a Gentile. It has to be noted that it was man who was authorized to go to a Gentile, not the message that was authorized. This proclamation of Jesus Christ to the household of one Roman centurion represents the entire ministry of Peter to the Gentiles. Otherwise, Paul was not the apostle to the Gentiles. There is no use to say that at this point God opened the door to every Gentile who wanted to come in. If the facts are faced and the truth is believed, Peter's ministry to Cornelius was his entire ministry to the Gentiles. Otherwise, Paul was not the apostle to the Gentiles. Peter had no commission to any other Gentile. He was not God's commissioned-one, God's apostle, to the Gentiles. He was God's commissioned-one to one prominent Gentile household. This served to prepare the believers in Israel, since Peter was first the one to do it, for the ministry of Paul among the Gentiles, that didn't start until 6 years later.
 6. The man Cornelius did not become a herald of the salvation-bringing message to other Gentiles. He may have wished to do this, but he could not do it without a Divine commission, and Paul was the only man that God commissioned and authorized to proclaim Christ to the Gentiles in the Acts period. No other man was commissioned. Paul says, "I am apostle to the Gentiles," and he was. There is a theory that Cornelius resigned his commission in the army and became a mighty preacher and went out and founded churches and so on. That is a lot of poppycock and tommyrot and there is no truth in it. Cornelius did not become a herald of God's salvation-bringing message. Maybe he would have wanted to. Maybe he would have liked to have told others. But he could not do it without a Divine commission, and Paul was the only man whom God commissioned and authorized to proclaim the Christ to the Gentiles in the Acts period.
 7. It was God's purpose, intention, and program in the Acts period that every man, woman, and responsible child in Israel should hear the salvation-bringing gospel and

- have a clear-cut opportunity to receive the Lord Jesus as the Messiah and the personal Savior. This is of the utmost important, for this tells us about God's purpose in the Acts period. It was Jesus the Christ Who was offered to them, and that offer was to be made to every Israelites in the land of Israel and every Israelite to the uttermost parts of the earth. That was God's program and purpose. He was going to cover every Israelite. It was up to God to do so.
8. This purpose was accomplished. Every Israelite on earth was covered. Those outside the land lived in tight pockets and could easily be reached, often just by going to a synagogue. You could reach there the leaders, and the leaders could pass it on. That purpose was completed, so that we can say without hesitation. In time I will bring you Scripture to prove it. I am not bringing the Scripture at the present time. I could give a message for every proposition if I went into all the Scripture that demonstrates this. I am simply telling you that as a result of all my years of study that I have given to the Acts period that God's purpose was that every Israelite should hear the salvation-bringing message, and that purpose was accomplished. Every Israelite on earth was covered. Those Israelites outside the land lived in little companies, in tight pockets. They were not scattered one here and one there, but there was a pocket here and a pocket there, and they could easily be reached, usually by the speaker, the herald, going into the synagogue.
 9. In the Acts period, the presentation of Jesus Christ and the proclamation of the gospel of Christ, which was the power of God unto salvation to all who believed, was done only by God-commissioned and God-authorized men. The message was always spoken by Divine inspiration; the message was always absolute truth. That message was never written, nor was it memorized and repeated over and over. The message was always fresh from God every time it was spoken. It could be varied to suit the needs of those who heard it, but any variation in it came from God, and these were made by God and not by man. One man could proclaim it just as well as another: ignorant fishermen spoke the message just as well as educated statesmen. In the Acts period, throughout that 33 years, the presentation of Jesus Christ was always by God-commissioned and God-authorized men, and their abilities, education, and wisdom had nothing to do with it. One man could proclaim it just as well as another. An ignorant fisherman like Peter or a statesman like Paul could do so, because it was God Who gave the message.
 10. This was a work that was to be performed very quickly. If all Israel was to be covered in 33 years, then in order to avoid all delays, all misunderstandings, and any need for translation, because something is always lost in translation, the gospel of Christ was always spoken in the pure mother tongue of the one for whom it was intended. That was the gift of tongues in the Acts period. That was a meaningful reality in the Acts period. The idea that the gift of tongues in the New Testament was a lot of ecstatic babble that was spoken when someone had lost control of himself is abhorrent to the record of the Bible. There is nothing like that at all in the Word of God. This gift of tongues in the Acts period was because men were going out to Israel, and many of these had been out of their land for many generations and couldn't understand the language that was used in Israel. Some might speak a language, travel ten miles, and find an entirely different language. In order to avoid all delays, all misunderstandings, and all need to learn another language, and all need to translate a language, this

message of Christ was always spoken in the pure mother tongue of the one for whom it was intended. That was the gift of tongues, and it was a very meaningful reality in the Acts period.

IV. Conclusion. These 23 propositions set forth many things that were true in the Acts period, but that are not truth for today. They will sound very radical to many who hear these words, and if their knowledge of the book of Acts and the epistles of Paul is somewhat hazy or superficial, if their knowledge of the book of Acts is the result of hearsay rather than personal study, they will be inclined to repudiate these out of hand. I would ask them to note that the Scriptural proof of these statements will be supplied in the messages that are to follow.