

Sunday, May 6, 2012—Grace Life School of Theology—*Grace History Project*—Lesson 66
When Was the Mystery no Longer a Mystery? Advancements in Pauline Truth 1870-1900, Part 2

C.H. Mackintosh's *The Life and Times of Elijah* Exact Date Unknown Continued

- CHM's comments on Acts 28:28 have led some to conclude that he was teaching the Acts 28 position, i.e., that the body of Christ started in Acts 28. It is best to consider Mackintosh in his own words.
 - "There was now no more hope. Every effort that love could make had been made, but to no purpose; and our apostle, with a reluctant heart, shuts them up under the power of that judicial blindness which was the natural result of their rejection of the salvation of God. Thus every obstacle to the clear and full development of Paul's gospel was removed. He found himself in the midst of the wide Gentile world — a prisoner at Rome and rejected of Israel. He had done his utmost to tarry among them; his affectionate heart led him to delay as long as possible ere he would reiterate the prophet's verdict; but now all was over — every expectation was blasted — all human institutions and associations present to his view nothing but ruin and disappointment; he must therefore set himself to bring out that holy and heavenly mystery which had been hid in God from ages and generations — the mystery of the Church as the body of Christ united to its living Head by the Holy Ghost.

Thus closes the Acts of the Apostles, which, like the Gospels, is more or less connected with the testimony to Israel. So long as Israel could be regarded as the object of testimony, so long the testimony continued; but when they were shut up to judicial blindness, they ceased to come within the range of testimony, wherefore the testimony ceased. . .

But there could be numerous degrees of elevation as regards the standing of the saint. For example, a saint in the opening of Acts had higher privileges than a saint under the law. Moses, the prophets, John, our Lord in His personal ministry, and the twelve, all brought out varied aspects of the believer's position before God. But Paul's gospel went far beyond them all. It was not the kingdom offered to Israel on the ground of repentance, as by John the Baptist and our Lord; nor was it the kingdom opened to Jew and Gentile by Peter in Acts 3 and Acts 10; but it was *the heavenly calling of the Church of God composed of Jew and Gentile, in one body, united to a glorified Christ by the presence of the Holy Ghost*.

The Epistle to the Ephesians fully develops the mystery of the will of God concerning this. There we find ample instruction as to our heavenly standing, heavenly hopes, and heavenly conflict. The apostle does not contemplate the Church as a pilgrim *on earth*, (which, we need not say, is most true,) but as sitting *in Heaven*: not as toiling *here*, but resting *there*. "He hath raised us up together, and made us *sit* together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus." It is not that He *will* do this, but "He hath" done it. When Christ was raised from the dead, all the members of His body were raised also; when He ascended into Heaven they ascended also; when He sat down, they sat down also; that is, in the

counsel of God, and to be actualised in process of time by the Holy Ghost sent down from Heaven.

Such was the thought and purpose of the divine mind concerning them. Believers did not know this at the first; it was not unfolded by the ministry of the twelve, as seen in the Acts of the Apostles, because the testimony to Israel was still going on; and so long as earth was the manifested scene of divine operation, and so long as there was any ground of hope in connection with Israel, the heavenly mystery was held back; but when earth had been abandoned and Israel set aside, the apostle of the Gentiles, from his prison at Rome, writes to the Church, and opens out all the glorious privileges connected with its place in the Heavens with Christ. When Paul arrived at Rome as a prisoner he had, as it were, arrived at the end of all human things. He no longer thought of the Church as exhibiting anything like a perfect testimony on earth. He knew how things would turn out as regards the Church's earthly path; he knew that it would fare with it even as it had fared with the vessel in which he had sailed from Jerusalem to Rome; but his spirit was buoyed up by the happy assurance that nothing could touch the unity of the body of Christ, because it was a unity infallibly maintained by God Himself."

- Acts 28 Dispensationalist, Stuart Allen quotes the preceding section from Mackintosh in his 1969 book *The Early Centuries and the Truth*. Allen makes the following assertions regarding CHM's understanding of the book of Acts. Ultimately, Allen views Mackintosh as an Acts 28 Dispensationalist.
 - "The writer (CHM) sees clearly the dispensational character of the Acts, with the people of Israel coming first right up to the last chapter. He realizes that the truth of the great secret (Mystery) revealed through Paul the prisoner of the Gentiles was not known or commended at Acts 2. Neither is the ministry of Peter or the Twelve connected with it. Rather the first unfolding of this Divine secret is after Israel's rejection at Acts 28, and made known in the first epistles written after that event, namely those to the Ephesians and Colossians. It is all the more remarkable when one remembers that this was written and taught a hundred years ago. How comes it then that this teaching is dubbed as ultra-dispensational by many of the present day followers of the movement to which C.H. Mackintosh was attached, and looked upon as a concoction of Dr. E.W. Bullinger and Charles H. Welch? " (Allen, 40)
- It is easy to see why Allen would view Mackintosh as an Acts 28 Dispensationalist. Some of what CHM says is in line with standard Acts 28 viewpoints. All of this raises the interesting question of what makes someone an Acts 28 Dispensationalist? Michael Penny, author of *Approaching the Bible*, an Acts 28 Dispensationalist, points out the tension between CHM's comments on Acts 28 and his application of all of Paul's epistles to the body of Christ.
 - "It would be wrong to give the impression that all, or indeed any, of the above writers agreed with the detailed approach advocated in this book. They were all dispensationalists, but more than that, they all saw something of signification occurring at the end of Acts. However, some of them did not relate their views on Acts with their comments on the epistles or letters written during Acts. For example, they might state that Israel was set aside in Acts 28:25-27 and that the announcement that God's salvation was sent to the Gentiles in Acts 28:28

signified the close of one dispensation and the start of another. They might state that the letters of James, Peter, John, and Jude, as well as the letter to the Hebrews, were for Israel. However, some continued to hold that all of Paul's letters concerned this dispensation. They failed to see that his earlier ones, the ones he wrote during Acts, Galatians—1 & 2 Thessalonians, 1 & 2 Corinthians, and Romans were all for that time. They involved the central people of Acts, Israel. The churches of that time were mixtures of Jews and Gentiles, with those of Hebrew descent still, rightly, occupying the first place and observing the Law of Moses.

We can see tension between their comments on the Acts of the Apostles and their comments on the letters written during Acts with a number of writers. It is there in C.H. Mackintosh's *The Life and Times of Elijah the Tishbite. . .* (Penney, 206)

“Welch has often been credited with the discovery of the dispensational change in Acts 28:28. However, many who lived and wrote before him had seen the significance of the last pronouncement in Acts 28:25-28 of Isaiah 6, including Anderson, Bullinger, Mackintosh and many others. Some have suggested that Welch's breakthrough was to recognize that if the dispensational change came at the end of Acts, it was inconsistent to treat the earlier letters of Paul as one with his later letters. To leave Paul's earlier letters in the Acts dispensation and to consider his later ones as pertaining to the post-Acts dispensation is consistent and far more sensible. However, Welch may not have been the first to come to this conclusion. Both Mackintosh and Holden had written of the difference between Paul's earlier and later ministries, although from their writings it does not seem as if they had come to as clear-cut a view as Welch.” (Penney, 212)

- Whether or not C.H. Mackintosh should rightly be viewed as an Acts 28 dispensationalist is difficult to say. His thoughts in *The Life and Times of Elijah* are muddled at best. CHM seems to view Paul as having known the unique contents of his gospel and the mystery during the Acts period; however the time had not come for it to be fully proclaimed.
 - “But did the council at Jerusalem **apprehend the truth of the Church, of Jews and Gentiles so truly formed in “one body” that they are no more Jew nor Gentile?** I believe not. **A few members might have heard it from Paul** (see Gal. 2: 12), but as a whole they do not seem to have understood it as yet.” In order for them to have heard it from Paul at the Jerusalem council, Paul would have had to have known the mystery before Acts 15.”
 - “Now Paul's departure may be looked upon as the immediate precursor of all this. **The peculiar truth of which he was the depositary could only be brought out in all its fullness and power in connection with the abandonment of earth as the *manifested scene of divine operation*.** Hence Paul's journey from Jerusalem to Rome must be viewed with deepest interest by the intelligent and reflecting Christian.” If Paul's final departure from Jerusalem brought out the proclamation of the depositary of doctrine committed to Paul in “all its fullness and power,” then clearly Paul had already been making it known to some degree prior to his final departure from Jerusalem.”

- These comments coupled with the fact that Mackintosh does not distinguish between the Acts and post-Acts epistles but accepts all the Pauline as epistles as equally applying to the church leads me to conclude that CHM cannot rightly be viewed as an Acts 28 Dispensationalist. As we have already seen, CHM was not an Acts 2 Dispensationalist either. So then what was he? I cannot in good faith call Mackintosh a Mid-Acts Dispensationalist because he shows many Acts 28 tendencies. I think that we can safely conclude that CHM was a Pauline Dispensationalist. That is, Mackintosh understood that Paul was given a different commission than the one given to Peter and the Twelve. To the Apostle Paul, the apostle of the gentiles, was committed the revelation of the mystery concerning the heavenly purpose and calling of the church the body of Christ. He viewed the early chapters of Acts as the kingdom being offered to the nation of Israel. On these points Mackintosh is explicitly clear despite his lack of consistent clarity over where the dispensational boundary should be drawn.
- Mackintosh understood that the current dispensation would last until the rapture of the church.
 - “He was not ashamed, for he knew that the Church, though broken in pieces here, was nevertheless held in the everlasting grasp of the Son of God, and that He was able to keep it until the happy moment of its rapture to meet Him in the air. . . And then, as to the Church’s hope, “we look for the Saviour,” and not for the accomplishment of any earthly event. Thank God, believers are not taught to wait for the revelation of Antichrist, but for the appearing of the blessed Son of God, who loved them and gave Himself for them. Christians should understand that they have nothing to look for save their rapture into the air to meet the Lord. The world may ridicule the idea, and false teachers may build up systems hostile to it, for the purpose of shaking the faith of the simple-minded; but through grace we will continue to “comfort one another” with the assurance that “the days are at hand, and the effect of every vision.” ”
- In addition, CHM seems to have understood some things about positional truth and the believer’s standing in Christ.
 - “But it may be asked: How can believers be said to be seated in heavenly places when they are yet in the world, struggling with its difficulties, its sorrows and temptations? The same question may be asked in reference to the important doctrine of Rom. 6: How can believers be represented as dead to sin when they find sin working in them continually? The answer to both is one and the same.

God sees the believer as dead with Christ, and He also sees the Church as raised with and seated in Christ; but it is the province of faith to lead the soul into the reality of both. “Reckon yourselves to be” what God tells you you are. The believer’s power to subdue indwelling corruption consists in his reckoning himself to be dead to it; and his power of separation from the world consists in his reckoning himself to be raised with Christ and seated in Him. The Church, according to God’s estimation, has as little to do with sin and the world as Christ has; but God’s thoughts and our apprehensions are very different things.”
- The church of Christendom has fallen tragically short of a true Scriptural understanding of the nature of the church the body of Christ, according to Mackintosh. In short, there

will always only be a small minority of believers who comprehend the heavenly character and calling of the church as preached by the Apostle Paul.

- “We must never forget that every tendency of the human mind not only falls short of but stands actually opposed to all this divine truth about the Church. We have seen how long it was ere man could take hold of it — how it was forced out, as it were, and pressed upon him; and we have only to glance at the history of the Church for the last eighteen centuries to see how feebly it was held and how speedily it was let go. The heart naturally clings to earth, and the thought of an earthly corporation is attractive to it.

Hence we may expect that the truth of the Church's heavenly character will only be apprehended and carried out by a very small and feeble minority.”

It is not to be supposed that the Protestant reformers exercised their thoughts on this momentous subject. They were made instrumental in bringing out the precious doctrine of justification by faith from amid the rubbish of Romish superstition, and also in letting in upon the human conscience the light of inspiration in opposition to the false and ensnaring dogmas of human tradition.

This was doing not a little: yet it must be admitted the position and hopes of the Church engaged not their attention. It would have been a bold step from the church of Rome to the Church of God; and yet it will be found in the end that there is no distinct neutral ground between the two; for every church, or, to speak more accurately, every religious corporation, reared up and carried on by the wisdom and resources of man, be its principle ever so pure and ever so hostile to Catholicism, will be found, when judged by the Spirit, and in the light of Heaven, to partake more or less of the element of the Romish system.

The heart clings to earth, and will with difficulty be led to believe that the only time wherein God ceases to be manifestly occupied about earth — that the only unnoticed interval in the history of time — is just the period wherein He, by the Holy Ghost, is gathering out the Church to form the body of Christ; and moreover, that when God was dealing publicly with earth, the Church, properly so called, was not contemplated; and that when He shall resume His public dealings with the earth and with Israel, the Church will be out of the scene. . .

Sects are not the Church, nor religious parties the body of Christ. Hence, to be attached to the sects is to find ourselves in some of those numerous tributary streams which are rapidly flowing onward into the terrible vortex of which we read in Rev. 17 and 18. Let us not be deceived — principles will work, and systems will find their proper level. Prejudice will operate, and hinder the carrying out of those heavenly principles of which we speak.

- In a candid section at the close of *The Life and Times of Elijah*, CHM makes a powerful statement about all those who will resolve to stand for Pauline authority.
 - “Those who will maintain Paul's gospel will find themselves, like him, deserted and despised amid the splendid pomp and glitter of the world. The clashing of ecclesiastical systems, the jarring of sects, and the din of religious controversy,

will surely drown the feeble voices of those who would speak of the heavenly calling and rapture of the Church.

But let the spiritual man who finds himself in the midst of all this sad and heart-sickening confusion remember the following simple principle: *Every system of ecclesiastical discipline, and every system of prophetic interpretation, which would connect the Church, in any one way, with the world, or things of the world, must be contrary to the spirit and principles of the great mystery developed by the Holy Ghost in the apostle of the Gentiles.*”

Conclusion

- While I do not view Mackintosh as a full-fledged Acts 28 Dispensationalist, his views certainly are a precursor to the views of Bullinger later in his ministry and Charles Welch.
- When one considers the works we have surveyed thus far it becomes apparent that Acts 2 (Darby and Trotter), Mid-Acts (Holden), and early Acts 28 (Mackintosh) dispensational views were all in print before the year 1900. This understanding gives richness to the historical development of dispensational theology apart from the institutional cookie cutter approach that has for too long dominated these discussions. Much more was known and in print and at an earlier date than many students of dispensational theology have heretofore realized.
- In our next lesson we will consider another work, E.W. Bullinger’s 1895 publication *The Mystery*.

Works Cited

Allen, Stuart. *The Early Centuries and the Truth*. London England: The Berean Publishing Trust, 1969.

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