

My reply to Tony Garland's dismissal of mid-Acts dispensationalism

Tony Garland's article at Spirit and Truth

Tony Garland of "Spirit and Truth" has published a well thought out and intelligent critique and dismissal of mid-Acts dispensationalism. You can read the complete article at this link;

<http://www.spiritandtruth.org/questions/17.htm>

I made contact with Tony with the intent of defending the teaching that enabled me to believe and be saved. Tony was unwilling to discuss mid-Acts dispensationalism further. He has dealt with it and dismissed it and has now moved on.

Here is an extract which shows his line of reasoning:

"In the case of mid-Acts dispensationalism, there are a variety of views, partly because mid-Acts dispensationalists cannot agree among themselves as to when Paul's ministry to the Gentiles is thought to have transitioned from the teaching of the early church. Did this occur in Acts 9 (at Paul's conversion)? Or in Acts 13 (at Paul's initial mission to the Gentiles, Acts 13:2)? Or perhaps it was in Acts 28 when the gospel was rejected by Israel and Paul announced he would turn to the Gentiles (Acts 28:25-28)? (Some also see the transition as being in Acts 8 or 11.)

The problem of establishing just exactly where this supposed "gear-shift" in the plan of God takes place highlights the fact that Scripture itself lacks any clear indication of such a shift. This is where normative dispensationalism has a clear advantage: Scripture places great emphasis upon the coming of the Spirit on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2). This very important event in the plan of God is underscored by the signs and manifestations which accompanied it and by their initiation entirely at God's initiative. In other words, we don't have to try to read between the lines (about whether Peter or Paul presented salvation certain ways) to determine whether or when a discontinuity occurs--God Himself has made it abundantly clear in the events of Acts 2."

The church began on the day of Pentecost

Tony teaches that the Church is defined by the presence of the Holy Spirit and began when the Holy Spirit was first poured out on the day of Pentecost. Unlike most mid-Acts people, I am in agreement with him on this point.

It is the one and only Holy Spirit of PROMISE that arrived on the day of Pentecost.

“And, behold, I send **the promise of my Father** upon you: but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high.” (Luke 24:49 AV)

“And, being assembled together with *them*, commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, **but wait for the promise of the Father**, which, *saith he*, ye have heard of me. For John truly baptized with water; but **ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence.**” (Acts 1:4-5 AV)

“Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the **promise of the Holy Ghost**, he hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear.” (Acts 2:33 AV)

This is the same Holy Spirit that believers are now sealed with when they first believe. The presence of the Holy Spirit of promise in believers, **WHATEVER THE DISPENSATION**, defines the Lord’s body. It is **HIS SPIRIT** that defines **HIS BODY**.

“But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the **Spirit of Christ**, he is none of his.” (Romans 8:9 AV)

“In whom ye also *trusted*, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that **holy Spirit of promise**, Which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory.” (Ephesians 1:13-14 AV)

It is because we Gentiles have become “partakers of his PROMISE in Christ” (the Holy Spirit) that we have become “OF THE SAME BODY” (as the Jewish saints).

“That the Gentiles should be fellowheirs, **and of the same body**, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel:” (Ephesians 3:6 AV)

The church, the body of Christ, could also be called the church of the Spirit of Christ. It is only the body of Christ if it is indwelt by the Spirit of Christ.

Peter’s little flock, the early Pentecostal church of God at Jerusalem, was a RIVER OF THE SPIRIT that flowed from a sect of Judaism to Christianity, from the earthly church to the heavenly church, from Peter to Paul, from the Jews to the Gentiles and from the first century to the twenty-first century. (The Spirit does not flow DIRECTLY from a saved person to an unsaved person. A saved person preaches the gospel to an unsaved person and if the unsaved person BELIEVES it, then the Father sends forth the Spirit of his Son into their heart.)

“And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, *Abba, Father.*” (Galatians 4:6 AV)

This should be on a neon sign outside of all mid-Acts fellowships:

PAUL WAS NOT THE FIRST MEMBER OF THE BODY OF CHRIST BUT HE WAS THE FIRST PERSON SAVED IN GOD'S UNPROPHESIED DISPENSATION OF GRACE.

Paul was given the dispensation of the grace of God to Gentile-ward (Ephesians 3:1-2), was the apostle of the Gentiles (Romans 11:13) and the God-appointed wise masterbuilder of the Christian church among the Gentiles (1 Corinthians 3:10, Galatians 2:9). But Paul himself acknowledged two of the saints at Rome as being "in Christ" BEFORE HIM. (Please don't try and prove that to be "in Christ" is somehow different to being "in the body of Christ". You will only prove that our apostle is in a different body to us!)

*"Salute Andronicus and Junia, my kinsmen, and my fellowprisoners, who are of note among the apostles, **who also were in Christ before me.**" (Romans 16:7 AV)*

Andronicus and Junia must have received the Holy Ghost in Jerusalem during the period covered by Acts 2 to Acts 8, and then journeyed to Rome. They had most likely first travelled to Jerusalem from Rome for Pentecost. That they were 'of note' among the apostles suggests that they may have been instrumental in founding the church of God at Rome.

"And there were dwelling at Jerusalem Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven." (Acts 2:5 AV)

Ricky Kurth at the Berean Bible Society pointed out to me that all of the Old Testament saints are also now "in Christ" though it could not be said that they were ever members of the church, the body of Christ. They were saved on the basis of what was to them the Lord's FUTURE redemptive work. This is a good point but it cannot be applied to Andronicus and Junia who were "in Christ" while they still walked the earth. If you are "in Christ", and you still have a living body of flesh, then you are a member of HIS BODY on earth, the Church. Andronicus and Junia received the Spirit of Christ while their bodies were still walking around on the earth. They did not have to wait until they had died and gone to heaven (as the Old Testament saints did).

If we are to follow our apostle's example then we should also acknowledge Peter's little flock as the church of God and not try and disconnect from them altogether.

*"For I am the least of the apostles, that am not meet to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the **church of God.**" (1 Corinthians 15:9 AV)*

Most mid-Acts 'authorities' will go to great lengths to prove that the church of God that Paul persecuted was a different church to the church, the body of Christ. But Paul used the same term "church of God", within the same epistle, when speaking of the church at Corinth (which he planted).

*“Unto the **church of God** which is at Corinth, to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, with all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours:” (1 Corinthians 1:2 AV)*

That the Lord regarded the church of God that Paul persecuted as **HIS BODY** is evidenced by his first words to Paul. He did not say “why persecutest thou my people Israel?” but said “why persecutest thou **ME?**”

“And he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?” (Acts 9:4 AV)

Although Paul’s encounter with the risen and glorified Lord was totally ATYPICAL of the manner in which the thousands of Peter’s flock at the time had come to believe, Paul received the Holy Spirit in a totally TYPICAL Jewish manner, through the ministry of an ordinary member of Peter’s flock – Ananias at Damascus. This direct lineage of the Holy Spirit from the Pentecostal church of God to the apostle of the dispensation of grace cannot be denied. The moment Paul received the Holy Spirit he was baptised into Christ’s body as it existed at the time – as a persecuted remnant of Spirit-filled Jews. But the Lord had special plans for this particular member.

The fact that Paul then became an enemy of his former nation, and was still somewhat feared and mistrusted by his new friends, worked perfectly for God’s will. The Lord never intended Paul to receive further revelation from the existing Pentecostal church of God. He was to receive it directly - by the revelation of Jesus Christ.

“But I certify you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me is not after man. For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ.” (Galatians 1:11-12 AV)

The hostility toward him from friend and foe alike, drove him to many years of separation in Arabia and Tarsus, during which time the Lord helped him put it all together for his coming role as dispenser of a new dispensation of God.

By the time of Paul’s salvation, Peter’s little sect of Jews in which the Holy Spirit dwelt had CEASED BEING ISRAEL and instead had become the “remnant according to the election of grace” (Romans 9:27, 11:5) – i.e. the beginnings of the Lord’s new body or Church. The branches of unbelieving, establishment Israel had already been broken off God’s olive tree by this point (Romans 11:17-20). Believing Jews remained as branches of God’s olive tree solely because of their belief. The branches of unbelieving Israel were broken off solely because of their unbelief. Believing Gentiles began to be grafted in (Acts 10) solely because of their belief.

“For if the firstfruit be holy, the lump is also holy: and if the root be holy, so are the branches. And if some of the branches be broken off, and thou, being a wild olive tree, wert grafted in among them, and with them partakest of the root and fatness of the olive tree; Boast not against the branches. But if thou boast, thou bearest not

the root, but the root thee. Thou wilt say then, The branches were broken off, that I might be grafted in. Well; **because of unbelief they were broken off, and thou standest by faith.** Be not highminded, but fear: For if God spared not the natural branches, take heed lest he also spare not thee. Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God: on them which fell, severity; but toward thee, goodness, if thou continue in his goodness: otherwise thou also shalt be cut off. And they also, if they abide not still in unbelief, shall be grafted in: for God is able to graft them in again. For if thou wert cut out of the olive tree which is wild by nature, and wert grafted contrary to nature into a good olive tree: how much more shall these, which be the natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree?" (Romans II:16-24 AV)

It is **IMPOSSIBLE** to separate the members of the church of God that Paul persecuted from what was later to become known as the church, the body of Christ – i.e. the Christian church. Barnabas was a member of the church of God that Paul persecuted. He is first mentioned way back in Acts 4.

"And Joses, who by the apostles was surnamed Barnabas, (which is, being interpreted, The son of consolation,) a Levite, and of the country of Cyprus," (Acts 4:36 AV)

Paul found no acceptance among those of the Jerusalem church of God until that same Barnabas spoke on his behalf to the apostles.

"And when Saul was come to Jerusalem, he assayed to join himself to the disciples: but they were all afraid of him, and believed not that he was a disciple. But Barnabas took him, and brought him to the apostles, and declared unto them how he had seen the Lord in the way, and that he had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus." (Acts 9:26-27 AV)

And it was Barnabas, full of the Holy Spirit, who brought Paul from Tarsus to help out at the church at Syrian Antioch – where they were first called Christians. Barnabas, a member of the Jerusalem church of God that Paul had persecuted, was called a Christian as early as Acts 11.

"Then tidings of these things came unto the ears of the church which was in Jerusalem: and they sent forth Barnabas, that he should go as far as Antioch. Who, when he came, and had seen the grace of God, was glad, and exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord. For he was a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost and of faith: and much people was added unto the Lord. Then departed Barnabas to Tarsus, for to seek Saul: And when he had found him, he brought him unto Antioch. And it came to pass, that a whole year they assembled themselves with the church, and taught much people. And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch." (Acts 11:22-26 AV)

It was Barnabas who was chosen by the Holy Spirit to accompany Paul on his first missionary journey.

“Now there were in the church that was at Antioch certain prophets and teachers; as Barnabas, and Simeon that was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen, which had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them. And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away. So they, being sent forth by the Holy Ghost, departed unto Seleucia; and from thence they sailed to Cyprus.” (Acts 13:1-4 AV)

Paul never ceased from acknowledging the debt we owe to the POOR SAINTS WHICH ARE AT JERUSALEM.

“But now I go unto Jerusalem to minister unto the saints. For it hath pleased them of Macedonia and Achaia to make a certain contribution for the poor saints which are at Jerusalem. It hath pleased them verily; and their debtors they are. For if the Gentiles have been made partakers of their spiritual things, their duty is also to minister unto them in carnal things.” (Romans 15:25-27 AV)

It is small wonder that mid-Acts dispensationalism is so vulnerable to attack when our leaders try to make hard scriptural divisions where there are none, thereby forcing us all into a position of defending error. Paul’s surprise salvation in Acts 9 is the nearest thing to a hard, historical dividing line for God’s switch to the grace dispensation. But the changeover from the Jewish Acts 2 dispensation to the grace dispensation was gradual and elements of it had occurred prior to Acts 9. You have to diligently study the WHOLE book of Acts to see the forest rather than the trees. It is only in Paul’s later prison epistles (e.g. Colossians, Ephesians, Philippians) that one can see the finished transition to the dispensation of grace.

The teaching by some mid-Acts people that God kept TWO dispensations running from Acts 9 to Acts 28 is a well-meaning effort to divert grace believers from the things particularly associated with Israel’s New Covenant dispensation. But in doing so they must treat those Jews that Paul called “the saints which are at Jerusalem” as being in a separate body to the church the body of Christ. They refrain from calling them Christians and instead call them ‘believing Israel’.

This cannot be so. The ship called Israel had a fatal collision with a Rock and began sinking when they murdered Stephen. (The mast did not disappear until Acts 28:28.) By God’s grace, a remnant remained in a lifeboat which continued taking a mixed bunch of Gentiles and Jews on board and came to be called the Church, the body of Christ. The occupants of the lifeboat, including some like Peter of the original remnant, came to be called Christians.

"Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf." (1 Peter 4:16 AV)

Confusion arises when modern day Christians do not apply God's PROGRESSIVE REVELATION to scripture. Computers can cope with an instant switch to a new operating system. When God switches the dispensation to human society it must be more gradual. Some still haven't caught on after nearly two thousand years of the grace dispensation.

It is most interesting to study the development of the Church in the book of Acts but we should be aware that things were changing throughout that period. For example, Paul started out water baptising then later declared he was "sent not to baptise" (1 Corinthians 1:17) and that the preaching of the cross is the power of God to those that believe. He started out preaching in the synagogues to the Jews (e.g. Acts 13:14-41) but even on this early occasion it was the Gentiles present who took more interest (Acts 13.42). By the time of Acts 28:28 he (and God) had become exasperated with the Jews and thenceforth focused solely on the Gentiles.

Tony is right about when the church began. It began with the arrival of the Holy Spirit and it continues wherever the Holy Spirit indwells today. But once the Holy Spirit gave the ball to Paul (Acts 13:2), the original Jerusalem church, which had begun on the day of Pentecost, ceases to be at the cutting edge of revelation and quickly fades from the story as it unfolds in the book of Acts.

Paul's most eloquent dealing with this subject is found in his epistle to the Ephesians. In time past we Gentiles were without Christ.

"Wherefore remember, that ye being in time past Gentiles in the flesh, who are called Uncircumcision by that which is called the Circumcision in the flesh made by hands; That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world:" (Ephesians 2:11-12 AV)

We Gentiles are made nigh by the blood of Christ, who has broken down the middle wall of partition between Jew and Gentile. The enmity was abolished in his flesh. The devil's power of death killed the Lord's flesh through the combined efforts of both Jews and Gentiles (Acts 4:26-28) and in so doing brought to pass the will of God and ensured Satan's destruction (Hebrews 2:14). God taketh the wise in their own craftiness (1 Corinthians 3:19). Both Jews and Gentiles were taken in their own craftiness and quite unintentionally made THE ONE ACCEPTABLE SACRIFICE FOR SINS FOREVER (Hebrews 10:12). He loved us even when we were enemies (Romans 5:10).

AT CALVARY the Lord accomplished all that was necessary for the coming dispensation of grace - by his blood and his flesh. He did not reveal this until AFTER ISRAEL HAD FALLEN - to his chief apostle on the rooftop of his Joppa lodgings (Acts

10:11-16) and to the future apostle of the Gentiles he personally recruited on the road to Damascus.

“But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us; Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace; And that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby:” (Ephesians 2:13-16 AV)

Through him we both have access by **ONE SPIRIT** unto the Father. We saved Gentiles are now fellowcitizens WITH THE SAINTS. What saints are these? Why, the **POOR SAINTS WHICH ARE AT JERUSALEM** of course! (We are not only fellowcitizens with the saints of Peter’s little flock at Jerusalem, but are also heavenly fellowcitizens with ALL of God’s saints since the world began.)

And came and preached peace to you which were afar off, and to them that were nigh. For through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father. Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God;” (Ephesians 2:17-19 AV)

In this dispensation of the grace of God, we Gentiles, **BY THE GOSPEL**, are partakers of spiritual things initially promised to Israel - God’s **PROMISE** in Christ.

“It hath pleased them verily; and their debtors they are. **For if the Gentiles have been made partakers of their spiritual things**, their duty is also to minister unto them in carnal things.” (Romans 15:27 AV)

“That the Gentiles should be fellowheirs, and of the same body, and **partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel:**” (Ephesians 3:6 AV)

Which gospel? Paul’s gospel of the grace of God of course!

“But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God.” (Acts 20:24 AV)

“Whereof I was made a minister, according to the gift of the grace of God given unto me by the effectual working of his power. 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;” (Ephesians 3:7-8 AV)

Which promise? The **PROMISE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT** - the Holy Spirit that was first poured out upon Peter’s little flock on the day of Pentecost!

“And, behold, I send the **promise of my Father** upon you: but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with **power from on high**.” (Luke 24:49 AV)

“ And, being assembled together with *them*, commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, **but wait for the promise of the Father**, which, *saith he*, ye have heard of me. For John truly baptized with water; but **ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence**.” (Acts 1:4-5 AV)

“In whom ye also *trusted*, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that **holy Spirit of promise**,” (Ephesians 1:13 AV)

The church started in one dispensation and moved into another

The Jerusalem church of God began when God’s dispensation of the New Covenant with the house of Israel began - when the Holy Spirit was poured upon them on the day of Pentecost. Note that it is a covenant with the house of Israel.

“But this shall be the covenant that I will make **with the house of Israel**; After those days, saith the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people.” (Jeremiah 31:33 AV)

The covenant as described in Jeremiah has led some to conclude that the literal Ten Commandments and 600-plus ordinances will be installed in one’s brain like the memorised lyrics of a song. Who needs all that when the Spirit of the author of the law, the Spirit of the living God, is poured upon them?

“And it shall come to pass afterward, *that* I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions: And also upon the servants and upon the handmaids in those days will I pour out my spirit.” (Joel 2:28-29 AV)

“But this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel; And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams: And on my servants and on my handmaidens I will pour out in those days of my Spirit; and they shall prophesy:” (Acts 2:16-18 AV)

Although the New Covenant baptism with the Holy Spirit had been proclaimed by John the Baptist right from the beginning of our Bible’s New Testament scriptures,

“I indeed have baptized you with water: but he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost.” (Mark 1:8 AV)

the Holy Spirit of promise could not be poured out on anyone until AFTER the Lord Jesus had made the ONE ACCEPTABLE SACRIFICE FOR SINS FOREVER.

“The next day John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.” (John 1:29 AV)

The Lamb of God had to be sacrificed for the sin of the world to be taken away. This is why Jesus told his apostles that it was EXPEDIENT for him to go away.

“Nevertheless I tell you the truth; It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you.” (John 16:7 AV)

Although proclaimed from the beginning of John’s ministry, the New Covenant did not actually come into force until AFTER THE DEATH OF THE TESTATOR.

“For where a testament is, there must also of necessity be the death of the testator. For a testament is of force after men are dead: otherwise it is of no strength at all while the testator liveth.” (Hebrews 9:16-17 AV)

Under this covenant the Jews needed only to do a couple of simple things (i.e. repent and be water baptised in the name of Jesus Christ) in order to receive the Holy Spirit. They had a covenant (a deal or contract) with God and he delivered his side of the deal, the PROMISE of the Spirit, in response to their fulfilling of their side of the deal by repenting and being water baptised in the name of Jesus Christ.

“Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.” (Acts 2:38 AV)

Get an unsaved Gentile of today to “repent and be baptised in the name of Jesus Christ” and see if he receives the Holy Ghost. You will find that it doesn’t work any more. I know. I tried similar stuff to this for years and no Holy Ghost. Sadly, a great many Christian churches are still trying to operate within God’s dispensation of the New Covenant to the house of Israel.

WE ARE NOW OPERATING WITHIN THE DISPENSATION OF THE GRACE OF GOD, WHICH IS NOT BETWEEN GOD AND THE HOUSE OF ISRAEL BUT BETWEEN GOD AND THE GENTILES.

“For this cause I Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles, If ye have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which is given me to you-ward: How that by revelation he made known unto me the mystery; (as I wrote afore in few words, Whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ) Which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit; That the Gentiles should

be fellowheirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel:" (Ephesians 3:1-6 AV)

That the Gentiles should be fellowheirs was revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit. This revelation began at the house of Cornelius (Acts 10) and gained momentum when the church at Syrian Antioch began to flourish (see Acts 11:19-26). [Note that in Paul's time, Antioch in Syria was the third city of the Roman Empire with around 200,000 inhabitants.]

The dispensation of the grace of God was given Paul to us-ward, i.e. GENTILE-ward. We Gentiles are partakers of God's New Covenant promise to Israel, but NOT THROUGH THEIR DISPENSATION of the New Covenant, which was solely with the house of Israel (see Jeremiah 31:33 above). We are partakers of Israel's promised New Covenant SPIRITUAL THINGS through the dispensation of the grace of God, given to Paul for us Gentiles.

"It hath pleased them verily; and their debtors they are. For if the Gentiles have **been made partakers of their spiritual things**, their duty is also to minister unto them in carnal things." (Romans 15:27 AV)

"For this cause I Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ **for you Gentiles**, If ye have heard of **the dispensation of the grace of God which is given me to you-ward:**" (Ephesians 3:1-2 AV)

If you gave your own beloved family an extraordinary gift that you had promised them and they viciously refused it and attacked and killed the family member who delivered it - what would you do? You could withhold it and not give it to anyone OR YOU COULD GIVE IT TO SOMEONE ELSE - someone outside of the family. Someone who truly appreciated it and received it WITH JOY.

"Then Paul and Barnabas waxed bold, and said, It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to **you**: (Israel- the Jews) but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles. For so hath the Lord commanded us, saying, I have set thee to be a light of the Gentiles, that thou shouldest be for salvation unto the ends of the earth. And **when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad, and glorified the word of the Lord:** and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed." (Acts 13:46-48 AV)

God gave to Israel an EXTRAORDINARY GIFT (the Holy Spirit) that had long ago been promised to them. Israel REJECTED God's extraordinary gift so God REJECTED Israel and offered his extraordinary gift to the Gentiles instead. Though previously strangers from Israel's covenants of promise (Ephesians 2:12), the blood of Christ had cleansed the Gentiles (Acts 10:15, Ephesians 2:13), and the gift was made available under a new and unprophesied arrangement - the dispensation of the grace of God, given Paul to Gentile-ward.

God did NOT PUT A STOP to the availability of the spiritual blessings that came with his New Covenant with the house of Israel. There is only ONE sacrifice for sins forever that is acceptable to him and only ONE mediator of the New Covenant.

“And for this cause he is the mediator of the new testament, that by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions *that were* under the first testament, they which are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance.” (Hebrews 9:15 AV)

“But this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God; From henceforth expecting till his enemies be made his footstool. For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified. Whereof the Holy Ghost also is a witness to us: for after that he had said before, This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, saith the Lord, I will put my laws into their hearts, and in their minds will I write them; And their sins and iniquities will I remember no more.” (Hebrews 10:12-17 AV)

“And to Jesus the mediator of the *New Covenant*, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than *that of Abel*.” (Hebrews 12:24 AV)

God raised up a new apostle - a very tough apostle who had been the meanest, baddest persecutor of his little flock of Spirit-filled believers. Unlike the other apostles, this one did not volunteer and was saved by the Lord's exercise of his power to save whom he will. He was saved by GRACE and in saving Paul the Lord began the new dispensation of grace, which is also a dispensation of the New Covenant but includes additional revelation of God's previously hidden plan to make the Gentiles fellowheirs and to offer the New Covenant blessings by GRACE to anyone who BELIEVES the good news of what the Lord has accomplished for us.

In this dispensation of the grace of God, salvation and the Holy Spirit are no longer just a “repentance and water baptism in the name of Jesus Christ” away. Salvation and the Holy Spirit are now totally by grace through faith.

“For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast.” (Ephesians 2:8-9 AV)

One receives the Holy Spirit today by the “hearing of faith”. We receive the PROMISE of the Spirit through FAITH.

“For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, *even* as many as the Lord our God shall call.” (Acts 2:39 AV)

“That the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.” (Galatians 3:14 AV)

Because the word of God is true then God is really only asking us to BELIEVE THE TRUTH of Paul's gospel. Easy believism, some call it. Who are they trying to kid? If we could CHOOSE what we believed *then* it would be easy. But true belief or faith is not something we can put on like a new item of clothing. Although such a superficial faith is enough to satisfy many people, the true seeker is WAITING FOR SOMETHING TO HAPPEN. He or she will only be convinced when something supernatural happens!

"In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise, Which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory." (Ephesians 1:13-14 AV)

So God gives us the earnest of the Spirit, a supernatural gift, to LET US KNOW that he has begun the salvation process in us. If you haven't noticed the Spirit's arrival then he probably hasn't arrived yet. The Spirit's presence is much, much more than being occasionally inspired by God. The Spirit is the Spirit of Christ himself and brings with him the FAITH of Christ and the RIGHTEOUSNESS of Christ – the RESURRECTION AND THE LIFE, ETERNAL LIFE which is crucified to this world and which crucifies this world to us.

[It is hard to know which pronoun to use when referring to the Spirit of God. 'IT' seems disrespectful and 'HIM' seems sexist because the same Spirit of God indwells female Christians. I think our language needs a new pronoun which is neither male nor female yet is still personal and respectful. There is neither male nor female in Christ - Galatians 3:28.]

Saved believers receive the Spirit of another person within them – the Spirit of Christ. This is not cause for us to run down the street crying "I am Jesus" or "I am God". Such behaviour will only get you a room in your local looney bin and a course of some strong anti-psychotic medication. You may have noticed that in a successful marriage, two people come to think and act as one over the years. So it is with our spirit and the Spirit of the indwelling Christ. It is like a marriage.

"For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh. This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church." (Ephesians 5:31-32 AV)

"But he that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit." (1 Corinthians 6:17 AV)

Our marriage to the Spirit of Christ may be rough going at first. Many near to us who are enemies of Christ will become our enemies and may viciously persecute us. This is normal and par for the course.

"Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you:" (1 Peter 4:12 AV)

We will continue to resist and rebel against our new partner to varying degrees but over the years our spirit will be conformed to the Spirit of Christ.

“For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren.” (Romans 8:29 AV)

“ My little children, of whom I travail in birth again until Christ be formed in you,” (Galatians 4:19 AV)

Salvation does not require a high IQ. Most with high IQs are too hopelessly carried away with their own brilliance to ever seek God in the first place. Salvation does require one very important quality – an ability to be EDUCATED; a willingness to allow our deep-seated IGNORANCE to be addressed. That is what it took for me and I am convinced that most unsaved people are separated from God by IGNORANCE which keeps them in UNBELIEF. Just like Paul.

“Who was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious: but I obtained mercy, because I did it **ignorantly** in unbelief.” (1 Timothy 1:13 AV)

This is really great news. Ignorance is FIXABLE. It was only because of dire personal need that I ventured into a Christian grace fellowship in 2006 and got my ignorance addressed. I got the information that enabled me to believe that Christianity is true. DISPENSATIONALISM. More specifically MID-ACTS DISPENSATIONALISM. You cannot take our apostle Paul seriously unless you also take his revelations from the risen and glorified Lord seriously. As soon as you do that you have moved from the earthly Jesus to the heavenly Jesus and power and the Holy Ghost will come upon you!!!!

“For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance; as ye know what manner of men we were among you for your sake.” (1 Thessalonians 1:5 AV)

I was not enlightened by acquiring wisdom. Instead I was saved by God once I conceded my ignorance regarding Paul’s office of apostle to the Gentiles. After all, **I AM A GENTILE**. I experienced the hearing of faith and the long-awaited arrival of the Holy Spirit suddenly – upon allowing my prideful ignorance to be addressed.

“This only would I learn of you, Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? Are ye so foolish? having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh? Have ye suffered so many things in vain? if it be yet in vain. He therefore that ministereth to you the Spirit, and worketh miracles among you, doeth he it by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?” (Galatians 3:2-5 AV)

This RECEIVING OF THE HOLY SPIRIT BY THE HEARING OF FAITH is the great change that proves the arrival of a new dispensation of God. When did it start? Well it must have started prior to Acts 10 because in the salvation of Cornelius and his friends

and family is the first case of Gentiles receiving the Holy Ghost and, more importantly, the FIRST case of the Holy Ghost coming upon people by the HEARING OF FAITH alone.

“While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word. And they of the circumcision which believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost.” (Acts 10:44-45 AV)

“While Peter yet spake these words”. No repentance (- they had no formerly existing ignorant denial of the Lord’s divinity to repent of. They immediately acknowledged the truth of Peter’s words). No water baptism (till after). The Holy Spirit came upon them by the hearing of faith.

If Cornelius and his people had **FIRST** “repented and been water baptised in the name of Jesus Christ” then their salvation would have been within the Jewish New Covenant dispensation. The salvation of the Gentiles had been prophesied (Isaiah 42:6, Amos 9:11-12, Malachi 1:11) and commissioned (Matthew 28:19, Mark 16:15, Luke 24:47). So the great indication that the dispensation had changed was when people started receiving the Holy Spirit by the hearing of faith alone.

If all saved after Cornelius were saved by the hearing of faith then there would be a lot less confusion over the issue of when the dispensation changed. Unfortunately God has not made it so easy for us. Water baptism PRIOR to receiving the Holy Spirit seems to have persisted. The changeover was gradual. Jews and Samaritans also seem to have had a need for the “laying on of hands” by a Spirit-filled believer in order to receive the Holy Ghost. Examples of this are found in Acts 8:17 (Samaritans), Acts 9:17 (Paul), Acts 19:6 (disciples who knew only of the baptism of John – most likely Jews) and 2 Timothy 1:6 (Timothy, who had a Jewish mother). I know of no example in the book of Acts where Gentiles required the laying on of hands to receive the Holy Ghost.

A word about repentance

A word of explanation is necessary regarding repentance. When giving an account to king Agrippa, Paul says that he shewed to both Jew and Gentile “that they should repent and turn to God”.

“Whereupon, O king Agrippa, I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision: But shewed first unto them of Damascus, and at Jerusalem, and throughout all the coasts of Judaea, and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance.” (Acts 26:19-20 AV)

I have come to see that repentance to both Jew and Gentile, in either the Jewish New Covenant dispensation or the later dispensation of the grace of God to the Gentiles, involves REPENTING OF IGNORANCE. Both Jew and Gentile are required to repent, but the ignorance they are repenting of is different.

The Jews ignorance was in denying the Holy One and the Just, the Prince of life.

“But ye denied the Holy One and the Just, and desired a murderer to be granted unto you; And killed the Prince of life, whom God hath raised from the dead; whereof we are witnesses. And his name through faith in his name hath made this man strong, whom ye see and know: yea, the faith which is by him hath given him this perfect soundness in the presence of you all. And now, brethren, I wot that **through ignorance ye did it**, as *did* also your rulers.” (Acts 3:14-17 AV)

The Jews, “unto whom were committed the oracles of God” (Romans 3:2), must repent of their ignorance in not recognizing Jesus Christ as the Messiah that these very oracles prophesied.

The Gentiles ‘who knew not God’ needed to repent of ignorant idol worship. I don’t think idol worship is the main ignorance Gentiles need to repent of in the 21st century. There are a host of competing religions today, many of which bundle Jesus Christ into their package. There are also thousands of ‘Christian’ denominations which emphasize certain interpretations of the scriptures in a wrongly divided manner and others have virtually done away with the scriptures altogether. Some denominations have rewritten the scriptures to fit their particular bent. The big gainers in the collective ignorance department at this time would be: 1) a combination of humanism and atheism which waits upon science for further revelation of what life is all about, and 2) the New Age smorgasbord from various religions plus occultism and alien visitors.

When Paul first addressed Greek Gentiles at Athens he declared that God had so far tolerated (‘winked at’) the ignorance of Gentile idol-worshippers. (The Old Testament bears testimony that God had NOT ‘winked at’ Jewish idol-worshippers who should have known better.) It is IGNORANCE that God commands men everywhere to repent of.

“For as I passed by, and beheld your devotions, I found an altar with this inscription, TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Whom therefore ye **ignorantly** worship, him declare I unto you.” (Acts 17:23 AV)

“Forasmuch then as we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Godhead is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man’s device. And the times of this **ignorance** God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent:” (Acts 17:29-30 AV)

It was the apostle’s hope that we would repent (change our minds) and acknowledge the truth – i.e. the truth of his gospel and all of God’s word.

“In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them **repentance to the acknowledging of the truth;**” (2 Timothy 2:25 AV)

John the Baptist called the Jews to repentance of their departure from the holiness expected of God's holy nation of priests. But he also foretold the ministry of the Lord.

*"I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance: but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with **fire**:" (Matthew 3:11 AV)*

I became acutely aware of what a mess I had made of things just prior to being saved. My need for relief from a fire in my brain of guilt, fear and shame, drove me to seek prayer from Christian friends. Please don't think I am exaggerating. I literally had the sensation of burning coals in my brain. I went and got a strong anti-depressant medication from my doctor which only further fueled the burning coals. Our God is a consuming fire and I fear that fire. I would never have gotten saved without that fire. ("T'WAS GRACE THAT TAUGHT MY HEART TO FEAR".)

*"Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear: For our God is a consuming **fire**." (Hebrews 12:28-29 AV)*

A week later I REPENTED OF MY IGNORANCE regarding the scriptures during an argument with their preacher, who was a Pauline, mid-Acts dispensationalist. It was at this moment that the Holy Spirit came into my heart. ("AND GRACE MY FEARS RELIEVED").

It is IGNORANCE OF THE TRUTH that we are asked to repent of. Things have changed since the time of John the Baptist. All things have now been put under the feet of the risen, glorified Lord who baptizes with fire and with the Holy Ghost. Repenting of your sins, though a good start, will not get you saved.

I am grateful that the mid-Acts preacher I argued with was patient with me and continued to MEEKLY INSTRUCT me in spite of my angry objections. I repented of my ignorance the moment I thought to myself "Maybe he's right". A silent, inner change of heart that was heard in heaven.

*"In **meekness instructing** those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth;" (2 Timothy 2:25 AV)*

I have just done some further repenting of ignorance myself, as any who read this section prior to my latest update will be aware.

The devil's Judaisers and loonies

I will digress a little here to explain why I believe there is such an epidemic of ignorance regarding God's truth.

Christians claim that they have the truth. Buddhists, Hindus, Moslems and a host of other outfits also claim to have the truth. How is a lost soul to know where to go for the truth?

The devil's main purpose is to corrupt or obscure God's word of truth. So where the devil is paying most attention THERE ALSO IS GOD'S TRUTH. Christianity is so infested with the devil's loonies that I should have realised long before 2006 that the truth was hidden there. If a religion appears very cool and together then the devil is leaving it alone. The truth isn't there.

That the devil's corrupting and obscuring of God's truth has been extremely effective is demonstrated by the deep-seated and widespread ignorance of true Christianity. The devil's 'Christians' are energetically spreading false gospels and disinformation. His main thrust is the same one that Paul spent much of his energies trying to purge from the churches he planted. JUDAISING - making Gentile believers see themselves as second-rate members of a church in which the Jews are the true aristocracy.

The devil wants to keep you ignorant of the fact that the glorified Lord Jesus Christ revealed unto Paul, the apostle of the Gentiles, a simple gospel to be broadcast to the whole world – a new dispensation of the grace of God sent to GENTILE-ward.

The church is not spiritual Israel. We are not honorary Jews. Yes, we are grafted into God's olive tree, but at a point BEFORE the first Jew was created by physical circumcision. We are grafted into a very low point in the olive tree, near the root and below the branches of Israel. We are grafted in by FAITH at the point where Abraham, while still a Gentile, believed God and it was accounted to him for righteousness. It is most of the natural branches of Israel, ABOVE our grafted-in wild branches, that God has broken off.

"He (Abraham) staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God; And being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform. And therefore it was imputed to him for righteousness. Now it was not written for his sake alone, that it was imputed to him; But for us also, to whom it shall be imputed, if we believe on him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead; Who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification. Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ:" (Romans 4:20-5:1 AV)

"And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed. So then they which be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham." (Galatians 3:8-9 AV)

“Well; because of unbelief they were broken off, and thou standest by faith. Be not highminded, but fear: For if God spared not the natural branches, take heed lest he also spare not thee.” (Romans 11:20-21 AV)

The law was added so that all are concluded in sin and prepared for the righteousness which is by faith alone. Most Jews misunderstood the purpose of the law and the Judaisers of Paul’s day, and of the 21st century, are those who trust in the law for righteousness and teach others the same.

“Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ. And this I say, that the covenant, that was confirmed before of God in Christ, the law, which was four hundred and thirty years after, cannot disannul, that it should make the promise of none effect. For if the inheritance be of the law, it is no more of promise: but God gave it to Abraham by promise. Wherefore then serveth the law? It was added because of transgressions, till the seed should come to whom the promise was made; and it was ordained by angels in the hand of a mediator. Now a mediator is not a mediator of one, but God is one. Is the law then against the promises of God? God forbid: for if there had been a law given which could have given life, verily righteousness should have been by the law. But the scripture hath concluded all under sin, that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe. But before faith came, we were kept under the law, shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed. Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith.” (Galatians 3:16-24 AV)

Any teaching which counters Judaising is in for a torrid time and will soon fall prey to the devil’s massive onslaught. This is precisely what is happening to mid-Acts dispensationalism. Mid-Acts cults of personality are springing up all over the place and, as Tony Garland has pointed out, we mid-Acts people can’t agree on very much. If you can’t see that the devil is behind this then you are being very effectively blinded by him.

Dogma has taken the place of “searching the scriptures to see if it is so”. Established teachers have become too proud to admit when they are wrong. What would their adoring followers think? God forbid they should appear as mere humans capable of making mistakes.

So the devil’s loonies are now working overtime from within and without to discredit mid-Acts dispensationalism. GOOD! If we didn’t have the truth then the devil would leave us alone!

Israel’s blasphemy and fall

We mid-Acts dispensationalists see that a major “gear-shift” in God’s dealing with the people of earth occurred sometime after Israel’s rejection of the Holy Spirit in Acts 7.

We see Spirit-filled Stephen's martyrdom, at the hands of God's holy nation of priests, as a key turning point in God's dealings with the people of earth.

Tony declares that "scripture itself lacks any clear indication of such a shift". Yes. A certain amount of inference is necessary to base Israel's fall upon Stephen's murder. But that Israel fell is recorded in scripture (e.g. Romans 11:12) and scripture also makes it very clear that God will not take any man's blaspheming against the Holy Spirit lightly. Will he do nothing when the leaders of his holy nation of priests start murdering Spirit-filled believers?

"But he that shall blaspheme against the Holy Ghost hath never forgiveness, but is in danger of eternal damnation:" (Mark 3:29 AV)

Because of Israel's blasphemy against the Holy Ghost, God could no longer deal with the world through a dispensation to Israel. The early Pentecostal church had begun within a dispensation of God to Israel – the prophesied New Covenant between God and the house of Israel. With Stephen's murder, Israel had rejected the Holy Spirit and the New Covenant.

Israel's "fulness" was (and is) necessary to God's prophesied purpose. ISRAEL'S FULNESS WAS OBVIOUSLY NOT GOING TO HAPPEN back around A.D.33. And so enters God's UNPROPHESIED purpose – the revelation of the mystery to our apostle Paul.

"Now to him that is of power to stablish you according to my gospel, and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began," (Romans 16:25 AV)

God did not do away with the New Covenant, but instead of offering it through Israel, he "concluded them all in unbelief" and made the New Covenant blessings available by his grace to anyone who truly "believes on the Lord Jesus Christ". There is no difference between Jew and Gentile in God's new dispensation of grace to the whole world.

"And brought them out, and said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved? And they said, **Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house.**" (Acts 16:30-31 AV)

"For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him." (Romans 10:12 AV)

"And so all Israel shall be saved: as it is written, There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob: For this *is* my covenant unto them, when I shall take away their sins. As concerning the gospel, *they are* enemies for your sakes: but as touching the election, *they are* beloved for the fathers' sakes. **For the gifts and calling of God are without repentance.** For as ye in times past have

not believed God, yet have now obtained mercy through their unbelief: Even so have these also now not believed, that through your mercy they also may obtain mercy. For God hath concluded them all in unbelief, that he might have mercy upon all." (Romans 11:26-32 AV)

"It hath pleased them verily; and their debtors they are. **For if the Gentiles have been made partakers of their spiritual things**, their duty is also to minister unto them in carnal things." (Romans 15:27 AV)

"That the Gentiles should be fellowheirs, and of the same body, and **partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel:**" (Ephesians 3:6 AV)

When God concluded them all in unbelief he effectively returned the world to its pre-Israel state – i.e. when ALL were Gentiles.

Under the old dispensation the Gentiles would have been blessed through Israel's fulness (and still will be when Israel's fulness eventually comes to pass after the Deliverer comes out of Sion – i.e. after the Second Coming).

"And so all Israel shall be saved: as it is written, There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob:" (Romans 11:26 AV)

Under the new and current dispensation of grace, the Gentiles are blessed through Israel's FALL AND DIMINISHING.

"Now if the fall of them be the riches of the world, and the diminishing of them the riches of the Gentiles; how much more their fulness?" (Romans 11:12 AV)

The CASTING AWAY of Israel is the reconciling of the world.

"For if the casting away of them be the reconciling of the world, what shall the receiving of them be, but life from the dead?" (Romans 11:15 AV)

Individual Jews who want to be saved must now approach him in the same manner as us Gentiles. It is not that we saved Gentiles have become Israel - as many churches teach. We are God's Gentile children of faith. When Abraham was still a Gentile, he believed God and it was accounted unto him for righteousness. So it is with us.

"*Cometh* this blessedness then upon the circumcision *only*, or upon the uncircumcision also? for we say that faith was reckoned to Abraham for righteousness. How was it then reckoned? when he was in circumcision, or in uncircumcision? Not in circumcision, but in uncircumcision." (Romans 4:9-10 AV)

"He therefore that ministereth to you the Spirit, and worketh miracles among you, doeth he it by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? Even as Abraham

believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness. Know ye therefore that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham." (Galatians 3:5-7 AV)

The dispensation of grace was given to Paul

Paul was involved with Stephen's murder. He was consenting to it and minded the clothes of the Jews who threw the stones.

"And when the blood of thy martyr Stephen was shed, I also was standing by, and consenting unto his death, and kept the raiment of them that slew him." (Acts 22:20 AV)

Surely Tony and anyone with a smidgeon of common sense can see that God moved away from his earlier program when he saved Paul. God already had his twelve apostles. Merely the fact that the risen and glorified Lord FORCIBLY recruited a thirteenth apostle (from among his worst enemies) should give Tony a 'HINT OF THE CENTURY' that God was deviating from his earlier program.

The Lord displayed both irony and justice in choosing Paul to be his new apostle of a new dispensation of grace to both Jew and Gentile.

"For I will shew him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake." (Acts 9:16 AV)

The Lord's choosing and saving 'the chief of sinners' serves for a pattern which gives hope to the most wicked of sinners in his dispensation of grace: hope for all who should **HEREAFTER** (Paul-after) believe on him.

"This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief." (1 Timothy 1:15 AV)

"Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in **me first** Jesus Christ might shew forth all longsuffering, for a pattern to them which should **hereafter** believe on him to life everlasting." (1 Timothy 1:16 AV)

The Lord also gave us an indication of the composition of the church in the dispensation of grace, by choosing for its apostle a man who fully qualified as both a Roman and a Jewish Pharisee.

"And the chief captain answered, With a great sum obtained I this freedom. And Paul said, But I was free born. Then straightway they departed from him which should have examined him: and the chief captain also was afraid, after he knew that he was a Roman, and because he had bound him." (Acts 22:28-29 AV)

“Circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee;” (Philippians 3:5 AV)

In blinding Paul for three days prior to his being born of the Spirit, the Lord gave us a sign that served a dual purpose. It harked back to an episode during his earthly ministry when he declared that the Pharisees who ‘thought they could see’ would be better off if they were blind.

“And some of the Pharisees which were with him heard these words, and said unto him, Are we blind also? Jesus said unto them, If ye were blind, ye should have no sin: but now ye say, We see; therefore your sin remaineth.” (John 9:40-41 AV)

But it is surely also a type of the ‘sign of Jonah’ (Matthew 12:39-40). Saul the persecutor died on the road to Damascus. Paul the apostle was born of the Spirit three days later.

*“And Saul arose from the earth; and when his eyes were opened, he saw no man: but they led him by the hand, and brought *him* into Damascus. And he was three days without sight, and neither did eat nor drink.” (Acts 9:8-9 AV)*

Paul’s similarities with Jonah don’t end with the radical means by which God brought them both into line. Jonah was the rebellious prophet who went in the opposite direction when God sent him to the Gentile city of Nineveh to preach to the Gentiles there - so they might avoid the coming wrath of God (Jonah 1:1-2). Paul was the rebellious Pharisee who persecuted the church of God prior to being drafted as the apostle of the Gentiles (Romans 11:13) and sent to proclaim to Gentiles all over the world how they may be saved from God’s wrath (Romans 5:9).

Tony concedes that Paul was given additional revelation regarding the church but does not accept that God changed the DISPENSATION after Acts 2. He seems to treat the formation of a new body and a change of dispensation as the same thing. This seems to be Tony’s blind spot.

God’s earlier body of people on earth, his holy nation Israel, had been in existence for 430 years before they went through the “gear-shift” into the dispensation of the law. The church of God, which began on the day of Pentecost, went through a “gear-shift” less than two years after it began. Tony reckons that “scripture lacks any clear indication of such a shift”. I beg to differ. It has the clearest indication of all dispensations in that THE APOSTLE DECLARED THAT IT WAS SO.

To say that the new dispensation of the grace of God was NOT made known to Paul BY REVELATION, is to make Paul (and the Holy Spirit which inspired him) a liar.

“For this cause I Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles, If ye have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which is given me to you-ward: How that by revelation he made known unto me the mystery; (as I wrote afore in few words,” (Ephesians 3:1-3 AV)

The “dispensation of the grace of God” was given Paul to us-ward – i.e. GENTILE-ward. Paul’s gospel, the gospel or good news of the grace of God, was given him BY REVELATION. Paul was not saved until Acts 9. Therefore the dispensation of grace cannot have begun prior to Acts 9.

“But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God.” (Acts 20:24 AV)

“But I certify you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me is not after man. For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but **by the revelation of Jesus Christ.**” (Galatians 1:11-12 AV)

There is also a very clear scriptural indication of exactly who was the first person saved under the dispensation of grace. Once again we need only BELIEVE OUR APOSTLE. He declared his salvation a “**ME FIRST**” pattern of the Lord’s grace.

“And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who hath enabled me, for that he counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry; Who was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious: but I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly in unbelief. And **the grace of our Lord was exceeding abundant** with faith and love which is in Christ Jesus. This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief. Howbeit **for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might shew forth all longsuffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting.**” (1 Timothy 1:12-16 AV)

Why was Paul the first person saved under the new dispensation? All of those who had received the Holy Spirit prior to Paul were worthy of salvation to a greater or lesser extent. They were not ignorant and they were not unbelieving. **Paul was in ignorance and unbelief - utterly unworthy and making war on the very Lord who saved him.** In this dispensation of the grace of God, he has **concluded all in unbelief** and saves who he will, according to his purpose.

“And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are **the called according to his purpose.**” (Romans 8:28 AV)

Although this seems to take salvation entirely out of our hands and put it entirely in God’s hands (as Calvinists teach) we must remember that God also told us to “seek and ye shall find”. We must “diligently seek him”. Was our call to diligently seek God predestinated? I don’t know. It certainly seemed like it was my idea to do the seeking. As a Catholic nun once told me, we must “act as though everything depends on us and pray as though everything depends on God”.

“And I say unto you, Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you.” (Luke 11:9 AV)

“But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.” (Hebrews 11:6 AV)

If those used by Satan are nevertheless personally accountable for their actions, (e.g. Judas Iscariot; see John 13:26-27 and Acts 1:16-18,) then there must also be personal accountability for those who diligently seek God. And there is. As Hebrews 11:6 above declares, “He is a rewarder of them”.

“Woe unto the world because of offences! for it must needs be that offences come; but woe to that man by whom the offence cometh!” (Matthew 18:7 AV)

Paul persecuted the Lord in ignorance and unbelief. He thought he was zealously serving the God of Moses, the God of the scriptures that he had studied with Gamaliel. It is not as though the Lord saved a totally depraved scumbag out of the blue. As is demonstrated in stories throughout the bible, God uses the most unlikely individuals to bring to nought things that are.

“But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are:” (1 Corinthians 1:27-28 AV)

All salvation is by the grace of God, through the faith of Jesus Christ, and the Spirit is received by each called person’s hearing of faith. I know that Paul received the Holy Ghost after water baptism and the laying on of hands and seemingly not by the hearing of faith that he later preached as being the sole way in which the Spirit is received.

“This only would I learn of you, Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?” (Galatians 3:2 AV)

Paul did not immediately receive the Holy Spirit by the hearing of faith but his Damascus road experience was enough to make even the most hardened anti-Christian a believer. He had both the hearing and the SEEING of faith.

“Am I not an apostle? am I not free? have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord? are not ye my work in the Lord?” (1 Corinthians 9:1 AV)

“And last of all he was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time.” (1 Corinthians 15:8 AV)

So he was a believer extraordinaire prior to his receiving of the Spirit when Ananias laid hands on him and water baptised him. Paul suffered a great deal for the Lord and never wavered from his faith and joy in the Lord through near death by drowning and stoning, beatings, captivity, violent persecution and the certainty of his coming execution in his last months. There is no doubt in my mind that he SAW and spoke with the ascended and glorified Lord Jesus Christ.

Israel's diminishing period from Acts 9 to Acts 28

Paul was the first person saved in the dispensation of grace and he was also given the job of dispensing God's grace to the world. Once the grace dispensation began, a remnant of Israel remained in the household of God by his grace and Jewish additions to the church were solely by grace, not works.

"Even so then at this present time also there is a remnant according to the election of grace. And if by grace, then is it no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then is it no more grace: otherwise work is no more work." (Romans 11:5-6 AV)

Jews and Samaritans required special treatment throughout the Acts period and, just as there are no recorded instances of Gentiles requiring the laying on of hands to receive the Spirit during this period, there are also no recorded instances of Jews or Samaritans receiving the Spirit by the hearing of faith alone. It is also apparent that the signs and wonders associated with the Jewish New Covenant dispensation persisted way beyond the commencement of the grace dispensation in Acts 9.

Paul received the Spirit through the laying on of hands and water baptism, yet it was also Paul who later declared that the Spirit is received only by the hearing of faith and that he was sent not to baptise but to preach the cross.

"For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel: not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect. For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God." (1 Corinthians 1:17-18 AV)

It was being progressively revealed to Paul that some of the spiritual things associated with Israel's dispensation of the New Covenant were to fail, cease or vanish away and that when "that which is perfect" has come then that which is in part shall be done away

"Charity never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away. For we know in part, and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away." (1 Corinthians 13:8-10 AV)

Some see “that which is perfect” as the completed revelation contained in Paul’s completed epistles. Because all thirteen verses of chapter thirteen of this letter written by the thirteenth apostle are extolling CHARITY, then “that which is perfect” is the full manifestation of God’s charity, or love, in a believer - as our old self-centred, carnal man dies and we exclusively become the body or vehicle of Christ’s PERFECT LOVE.

“Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.”
(Matthew 5:48 AV)

“Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ:”
(Ephesians 4:13 AV)

“And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him. Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment: because as he is, so are we in this world. There is no fear in love; but **perfect love** casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love.” (1 John 4:16-18 AV)

Christ’s perfect love can only be brought about in believers through the effectual working of both the Word and the Spirit of God, for the Spirit and the Word are one.

“For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received *it* not *as* the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe.” (1 Thessalonians 2:13 AV)

“For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and **these three are one.**” (1 John 5:7 AV)

Paul’s completed epistles contain the perfected doctrine for this grace dispensation, but Paul himself said that all scripture is given that the **MAN** of God may be perfect.

“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**, throughly furnished unto all good works.” (2 Timothy 3:16-17 AV)

And he did say ALL SCRIPTURE. There was more scripture to come from the apostle John whose contributions were penned after Paul’s martyrdom.

Signs and wonders are for the Jews and all of the signs and wonders associated with the Jewish Acts 2 dispensation followed Paul, at least until Acts 28, when he was still supernaturally healing the sick and surviving a deadly snake bite.

“And when Paul had gathered a bundle of sticks, and laid *them* on the fire, there came a viper out of the heat, and fastened on his hand. And when the barbarians

saw the *venomous* beast hang on his hand, they said among themselves, No doubt this man is a murderer, whom, though he hath escaped the sea, yet vengeance suffereth not to live. And he shook off the beast into the fire, and felt no harm. Howbeit they looked when he should have swollen, or fallen down dead suddenly: but after they had looked a great while, and saw no harm come to him, they changed their minds, and said that he was a god." (Acts 28:3-6 AV)

"And these signs shall follow them that believe; In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; They shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover." (Mark 16:17-18 AV)

"And it came to pass, that the father of Publius lay sick of a fever and of a bloody flux: to whom Paul entered in, and prayed, and laid his hands on him, and healed him. So when this was done, others also, which had diseases in the island, came, and were healed:" (Acts 28:8-9 AV)

"Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do; because I go unto my Father. And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If ye shall ask any thing in my name, I will do it." (John 14:12-14 AV)

Yet there is no talk whatsoever of signs and wonders in Paul's later epistles written after Acts 28. It is in Acts 28 that God, through Paul, ceases from trying to persuade the Jews and wholly turns to the Gentiles.

"Be it known therefore unto you, that the salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles, and that they will hear it." (Acts 28:28 AV)

The signs and wonders of Spirit-filled believers up to this point were God's way of provoking unbelieving Jews to jealousy with an external display of supernatural things.

"But I say, Did not Israel know? First Moses saith, I will provoke you to jealousy by them that are no people, and by a foolish nation I will anger you." (Romans 10:19 AV)

A different set of problems arises for Acts 2 dispensationalism or normative dispensationalism as Tony Garland calls it. I would rather have our problems than theirs.

- If Acts 2 dispensationalists can read then they will be aware that ISRAEL HAS FALLEN (Romans 11:12) and is CAST AWAY (Romans 11:15). How then can God's New Covenant dispensation via the house of Israel still be in operation?
- Acts 2 dispensationalists will try and get around the fall of Israel by claiming that the church, the body of Christ, is now spiritual Israel and that God's dispensation of his

New Covenant spiritual things via the house of Israel has carried on in an uninterrupted fashion via the Christian church.

OK. If this is the case then why don't they who repent and get water baptised in the name of Jesus Christ, invariably and immediately receive the Holy Ghost (Acts 2:38). (Some should also burst into spontaneous and supernatural tongues upon receiving the Holy Ghost (Acts 10:44-46)).

And why are they not all living together in communes and having all things in common, selling their possessions and goods and parting them to all the believers? (Acts 2:44-45)

And why can't believers HEAL THE SICK, RAISE THE DEAD, WALK ON WATER, MIRACULOUSLY FEED THOUSANDS OF PEOPLE, SURVIVE DEADLY POISON AND SNAKE BITES etc., etc. (Mark 16:17-19, John 14:12-14). Explain that for us, please Tony.

It is the pathetic charades of 'supernatural' gifts in churches that think they are spiritual Israel, that kept me, and no doubt thousands (millions?) of others, in unbelief. I am not saying that God doesn't ever supernaturally heal people any more. He does and I can testify that he does. But he didn't heal me in front of people as a sign or wonder to unbelievers. He did it when no one else was looking.

We mid-Acts dispensationalists see that BUT NOW God has revealed the mystery and that the dispensation of grace with the Gentiles is the arrangement by which we now receive his New Covenant spiritual things. His prior dispensation of New Covenant spiritual things via Israel's dispensation DIMINISHED with the house of Israel.

"Even the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, **but now** is made manifest to his saints:" (Colossians 1:26 AV)

The SPIRITUAL THINGS that God PROMISED under the provision of his New Covenant (the indwelling Spirit and all it brings with it – righteousness, salvation, eternal life etc.) are currently ONLY DELIVERABLE via his dispensation of grace with the Gentiles. Jews are not ineligible but get no special treatment because they have been concluded in unbelief along with unbelieving Gentiles. We are currently benefiting by the fall and diminishing of Israel because we are partakers of spiritual things which were initially promised to Israel.

"It hath pleased them verily; and their debtors they are. For if **the Gentiles have been made partakers of their spiritual things**, their duty is also to minister unto them in carnal things." (Romans 15:27 AV)

We need only explain why receiving the Spirit after water baptism and/or the laying on of hands persisted beyond Acts 9 and why signs and wonders persisted at least until Acts 28. I believe the explanation is that Israel DIMINISHED before being totally set aside by God in Acts 28.

"I say then, Have they stumbled that they should fall? God forbid: but rather through their fall salvation is come unto the Gentiles, for to provoke them to jealousy. Now if the fall of them be the riches of the world, and **the diminishing of them the riches of the Gentiles**; how much more their fulness?" (Romans 11:11-12 AV)

During Israel's diminishing period the things particularly associated with Israel remained. Receiving the Spirit through water baptism and the laying on of hands are associated with Israel and Samaria. Signs and wonders are also associated with Israel. As Israel diminished so did the spiritual things particularly associated with Israel.

"For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom:" (1 Corinthians 1:22 AV)

The bottom line for me

No matter how clear I try to make mid-Acts dispensationalism there remain certain anomalies which muddy the water and cause even serious students of the Bible, such as Tony Garland, to reject it.

- The bottom line for me is that I received the Holy Spirit by the hearing of faith.
- I received the Holy Spirit when I saw for the first time in my life that the risen, glorified Lord had saved the apostle Paul and sent him to us Gentiles with the dispensation of the grace of God. Implicit in this illumination is the full acceptance that the Lord is indeed risen and glorified and mediating between God and man from heaven.

You cannot take Paul seriously, as an apostle of Jesus Christ, unless you also take the Lord's MINISTRY FROM HEAVEN seriously. That is God's salvation "catch 22" and the reason that God raised Paul to prominence from Acts 13 onward. Take Paul seriously and you IMPLICITLY take the Lord's resurrection seriously - YOU ARE SAVED (Romans 10:9)

- I received the Holy Spirit when I realised that my arrangement with God is different to the arrangement he had with the Jews. After receiving the Holy Spirit, the Spirit himself moved Matthew, Mark, Luke and John into the background of my mind and helped me install Romans to Philemon (the scriptures of the grace dispensation to the Gentiles) into the foreground.
- I received the Holy Spirit when, for the first time in my life, I related to God and the scriptures **AS A GENTILE**.