

Gospel Gleanings, "...especially the parchments"

Volume 31, Number 14

April 6, 2014



Jesus and the Resurrection

Then certain philosophers of the Epicureans, and of the Stoicks, encountered him. And some said, What will this babbler say? other some, He seemeth to be a setter forth of strange gods: because he preached unto them Jesus, and the resurrection. (Acts 17:18)

The Book of Acts is the only inspired history available of the New Testament Church. All subsequent histories, though they may contain invaluable information regarding the existence and faith of a people, are of human origin. Most historians, however sincere and well-informed, write with a purpose. Their objective is seldom merely to report objective facts; they intend to prove something or to make some point through their writing. Acts bears strong internal evidence of being an authentic historical work. If someone contrived to write a history of the first generations of Christianity to convince unbelievers, he would carefully exaggerate the accomplishments of the apostles, and he would as carefully omit any record of their problems and failures. Not so our Book of Acts. It faithfully records the events that occurred, including major problems and failures. Acts 17, as one example, from the human perspective of convincing unbelievers and converting them to faith in Christ, records a failure on Paul's part. Instead of believing his preaching, they ridiculed and rejected him and his message. Only a few people believed his preaching; Verse 34 makes this point and names two of the people who believed. Paul's preaching on Mars Hill was no Day of Pentecost event for Paul.

And when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked: and others said, We will hear thee again of this matter. (Acts 17:32)

Jesus prepared the disciples for the reality that they would face. They should not expect everyone who heard them preach "Jesus, and the resurrection" to believe. Everyone didn't believe Jesus when He preached His own gospel "...as never man spake like this man." (John 7:46) The Parable of the Sower and the Seed describes three classes of people who hear the gospel who fail to bring forth fruit. We shouldn't expect a one-in-four reaction to our preaching, but the parable fully reminds us that all who hear will not believe. And all four groups do hear. (John 8:43; Matthew 13:16)

Consider the people to whom Paul preached on this occasion. He observed a city (Athens) "...wholly given to idolatry." (Acts 17:16b) Specifically, among those who heard him preach on this occasion were philosophers of two diverse

worldviews, Epicureans and Stoicks. (Acts 17:18) Epicureans held that pleasure as they defined pleasure in terms of "...tranquility and freedom from pain, disquieting passions, and fears, especially the fear of death,"¹ was the chief goal of man. They believed that the gods took no interest in any human activity. The stoics were arrogant in their attitudes toward others. They emphasized self-sufficiency and rationalism. They were also fatalistic. Perhaps other schools of Greek philosophy were present, but Luke records these.

If Paul had subscribed to the "Seeker sensitive" politically correct gospel of our world, he would have carefully avoided any reference to Jesus' sufferings and crucifixion, death, and resurrection. Such ideas to the philosophical Greek mind were utter foolishness. (1 Corinthians 1:22-25) But notice the emphasis that Luke gives to Paul's preaching, as witnessed in our study passage. "...he preached unto them Jesus, and the resurrection." Notice also Verse 32, quoted above.

Paul obviously had more than a passing knowledge of Greek philosophy. In his sermon that day, he quoted from two ancient Greek philosopher-poets, Epimenides (ca 600 BC) and Aratus (ca 315-240 BC). Despite the original writing of Epimenides being written to Zeus, "Ode to Zeus," Paul interpreted the words to refer to God, the one and only true God, "For we are also his offspring." (Acts 17:28b)

If Paul knew so much about Greek philosophy, why did he ignore those beliefs and so steadfastly preach a message that they would likely ridicule? The answer is simple. He was faithfully dedicated to preaching the truth of the gospel, not a politically correct message. If we omit "Jesus, and the resurrection," we have no gospel to preach! (1 Corinthians 15:13-19)

Most Bible historians agree that John wrote his contributions to the New Testament much later than any of the other writers of New Testament letters, perhaps in the last decade of the first century. His "General epistles," First, Second, and Third John, all fiercely expose and refute docetic Gnosticism, a first century philosophy that apparently attempted to

¹ Tom Constable, *Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible* (Galaxie Software, 2003), Ac 17:18.

slip into the church and transform the content of the gospel. It denied that Jesus had a physical body. Instead, it taught that he merely had a "Spirit body" that could give the appearance of a real body. Other gnostic beliefs of the age taught that Jesus was a mere man, albeit the best of men. They taught that the "Christ," deity, descended onto Jesus the man at His baptism, and that it departed from Him prior to His crucifixion. If John witnessed these heinous errors attempting to compromise the gospel, we can fully appreciate why he wrote these letters as he did. In fact, the presence of these errors also serves to explain why John's gospel is so different from the other three. Gnosticism was never the true message of the gospel; it was a false gospel from the beginning.

Any supposed gospel that denies that Jesus was fully God and fully man fails the most crucial test of gospel truth and earns John's emphatic charge of being "antichrist."

And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that spirit of antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world. (1 John 4:3)

For many deceivers are entered into the world, who confess not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist. (2 John 1:7)

No one can deny the literal fact that Jesus "...is come in the flesh" and make a credible claim to believe the truth of the gospel. And, given Paul's theme when preaching to Greek philosophers, "Jesus, and the resurrection," no one can deny His literal, bodily resurrection and lay any credible claim to New Testament truth.

Paul obviously understood the Greek philosophy that ridiculed his preaching quite well, but he refused to compromise the central truth of the gospel for anyone or any group of people.

For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom: But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness; But unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God. (1 Corinthians 1:22-24)

We see more of these two cultures in the New Testament than any other with the possible exception of Roman culture. Paul fully knew that neither of these cultures held any friendship to his gospel. Jews who demanded a sign for everything supernatural would stumble at his preaching. Greeks who prided themselves in their self-proclaimed wisdom would ridicule—call foolish—the idea of a man claiming to be God, but who was so weak that his countrymen arrested and tortured Him

before demanding the Romans to crucify Him. The idea that He would literally and bodily arise from the dead was for them beyond foolish. They, no less than the resurrection denying Sadducees, failed to respect the two things that affirm the truth of resurrection, 1) the Scriptures, and 2) the power of God. (Matthew 22:23-32; Mark 12:18-27; Luke 20:27-38) Whether it be a first century Sadducee, a first century Greek student of philosophy, or a twenty-first century critic, those who reject the Bible doctrine of the resurrection fail to respect these same two witnesses to a literal bodily resurrection, both of Jesus' body and of "...the just and the unjust." (Acts 24:15) Jesus confronted and refuted the Sadducees, first century Jews who denied life after death and a literal bodily resurrection. He gave us ample reason to believe this truth, amazing as it is to our minds. He in no way taught this truth in a way that might have suggested that He intended any kind of symbolic meaning to His words. All the New Testament Scriptures that teach the doctrine of the resurrection, both Jesus' and ours, are framed in literal form to demand a literal fulfillment of the Lord's promise. Jesus didn't come in a "Spirit body" that had no literal flesh and blood. He came in a real, literal human body. He ate, drank, slept, and even became tired in that real human body. And, yes, when the Jews arrested Him that night, they inflicted real torture onto His human body. And the next day when they demanded that the Romans crucify Him, it was a literal human body that they crucified. It was a real human body that Joseph and Nicodemus prepared and buried in Joseph's empty tomb. And, praise be to God, it was a real human body that came back to life and walked out of that tomb three days later. And, some forty days later, it was that real, literal human body that ascended into heaven in a cloud of glory. (Acts 1:9-11) It was a real Jesus who appeared to Paul (Acts 9) and to John. (Revelation 1)

Apart from Jesus' personal, literal, bodily resurrection, we have no hope of being raised. (1 Corinthians 15:12-19) For Paul, inspired by the Holy Spirit, if Jesus didn't literally arise, everything that we believe about God, Jesus, and the gospel becomes an empty fantasy. That is just how central this truth is to the gospel that we believe.

If the doctrine of "Jesus, and the resurrection" is so central to the New Testament gospel, how did saints in the Old Testament view this doctrine? Did they embrace a hope of its truth for them? Do other New Testament writers share Paul's emphasis on this doctrine? In coming weeks, God willing, we shall explore this theme.

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Worship service each Sunday
Joseph R. Holder

10:30 A. M.
Pastor