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The Baptism Of The Spirit

We looked at Matt 22:1-7 where Jesus predicted there would be two offers of the kingdom. The kingdom was first offered in the Gospels and that was rejected, they crucified the King; and second, in the Book of Acts, the kingdom is being reoffered to the nation Israel and that gradually is rejected.

We've looked at Acts 2 and Acts 2 is really a kingdom offer. What happened on the day of Pentecost with the tongues was interpreted by Peter as evidence that Jesus Christ was God who had been crucified and raised and was now ascended and seated at the right hand of the Father to send forth the Holy Spirit who caused what they both see and hear. This convicted a number of the men of Israel and they repented but it wasn't sufficient for the King to come in His kingdom.

Then we looked at Acts 3. Acts 3 is Peter's second sermon and Peter, again addressing the nation Israel, is offering the kingdom to Israel if she will repent. Repent and return so that the times of refreshing can come and Jesus will return from heaven and fulfill the Abrahamic Covenant. So there's a second offer of the kingdom, especially strong in the early portions of the Book of Acts. But this offer is gradually rejected and the Church is realized more and more.

And we outlined the realization of the Church in accordance with the theme of Acts 1:8; there is a spiraling out of the witness beginning in Jerusalem and working out. The first spiral out was the mini-Pentecost in Samaria, Acts 8, which is the Samaritan Pentecost. That was where the Lord worked to show the believing Jews that Samaritans were accepting Jesus Christ and not only did they accept Christ, not only were they saved by justification by faith, but they were also baptized by the same Holy Spirit. So it doesn't seem to matter

if you're Jewish or not, the same Christ, the same faith, the same Holy Spirit was coming on Samaritan people.

Then you have the second mini-Pentecost in Acts 10 and that was when Cornelius, a Roman Gentile and his household believed and Peter was astounded that a person who was not at all related to the Jewish nation, not at all racially part of the Jewish clan, you have him not only believing in Jesus Christ but receiving the Holy Spirit. The same thing that happened to Jews and Samaritans happened to the Gentiles. So now we have Jews, Samaritans and Gentiles all integrated into the same thing.

And finally in Acts 19 is the third mini-Pentecost and that's the passage where the OT saints of the Diaspora are brought into the group. They were saved people, they had believed in God's Christ as far as they could believe on Him, but they didn't have the rest of the content. So they were like a living Abraham, David or Joshua; they believed as they did but when they heard about Jesus Christ they were integrated in this thing.

So by the time you get to Acts 19 you've had all these groups integrated and it's the conclusion of the book that God is doing a new baptizing work of the Holy Spirit to build this new thing called the Church that is neither Jew nor Greek, male nor female, slave or free for we are all one in Christ Jesus. The realization of this new organism is seen more and more through the Book of Acts. As the Book of Acts comes to a close the re-offer of the Kingdom is abandoned and the city of the Jews is destroyed, that's AD70, the city of Jerusalem was destroyed. The Church at that point is fully on center stage

Obviously throughout this period the person who becomes central to this whole thing is the Apostle Paul. Peter is involved heavily early on and then Paul comes in. The interesting thing about Paul is that he was a member of the Jewish nation that had rejected the first offer of the kingdom; he came in on the second offer. And when Paul came in on the Damascus Road something happened during that event that I believe set up Paul's theology of the Church. In fact, it set up a lot of the theology for the entire NT that sets the Church apart from Israel.

Turn to Acts 9:3 and observe something that happened that day on the Damascus Road. "And it came about that as he journeyed, he was

approaching Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him; and he fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to him, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting' - the object of the verb "persecute" is what we want to look at because this changed Paul's life, and I believe this set up the NT theology. "...why are you persecuting" object of the main verb, "Me?" He doesn't say why are you persecuting believers, why are you persecuting those who accepted Christ. He says "why are you persecuting Me?"

In verse 5 we have his famous answer, "And he said, 'Who are You, Lord?' And He said, 'I am Jesus whom you are'" are now, present tense, "persecuting." So twice in this discussion the Lord makes the point that Paul is persecuting "Me." Let's follow the logic here. How can Paul persecute the Lord Jesus Christ? Here's earth, Paul's on earth, the Lord Jesus Christ is in heaven on the high ground at the Father's right hand. How is it that Paul, by attacking believers here on earth, is attacking the Lord Jesus in heaven? How can Paul who is attacking hundreds and thousands of believers in the Lord Jesus Christ down here on earth be attacking the Lord Jesus Christ in heaven? The Lord Jesus Christ is physically positioned at the Father's right hand. So it must have come as somewhat of a shock to Paul that when Jesus, who appeared to Paul from heaven, claimed to be being persecuted by Paul on earth.

The only thing Paul could conclude was that if this is so then Jesus Christ is somehow in union with those people, and here you have the birth in history the idea of union with Jesus Christ. Here's the heart of the NT theology; here's one of the earliest realizations of the Church and Paul never forgot this; he couldn't have forgotten it because this was the time when he became a Christian. It must have been indelibly impressed upon his mind, it must have taken him years of study in the OT and prayer and subsequent revelation, and thinking this through before he became the mature theologian that wrote the NT epistles.

That's why, for example, if we turn to Eph 1 he can write this kind of material; he can say the things he's saying because he has an understanding that there is a union of some strange sort that goes on between the risen Lord Jesus Christ and His saints who dwell on earth. Many epistles start the same way; I just picked Ephesians. Notice verse 1 how he addresses the Christians. He says, "Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, to

the saints who are at Ephesus,” that’s their earthly location, “and who are faithful in Christ Jesus.” The preposition in the Greek, *en*, or “in” and that preposition with Christ is used dozens and dozens of times in the NT. And it’s that sort of thing that we’re moving into now to understand that as we go into the doctrine of the Holy Spirit associated with Pentecost, because at the ascension of Christ was the heavenly origin of the Church, then the coming to earth out of heaven, the giving of the Holy Spirit is the earthly origin of the Church.

The reason this becomes so important to understand is this question, and this is a question that is vitally related to the Christian life. In the dispensation of Israel, during that time period in the OT, how were people justified? We know how they were justified because in Romans he tells us how they were justified; the same way we in the Church are justified, by grace through faith. So it can’t be that the difference between a believer in the Church Age and a believer in the dispensation of Israel is how one is justified. That is identical. So we can say they’re justified by faith and we’re justified by faith. Nobody in the OT was justified by works of the Law. So the difference isn’t here.

So we’re asking our self, what difference then does Pentecost make? If people are still justified by faith then what is the whole big deal with Pentecost? When we deal with the rapture of the Church you’ll see. Today we have post-trib and mid-trib and pre-wrath people running around and a lot of them are totally confused about the removal of the Holy Spirit. They haven’t got a clue about it and I think the reason they haven’t got a clue about it is because they’ve never figured out what difference Pentecost makes. Pentecost is the beginning of the Church. And they can’t deal with the end of the Church because they haven’t dealt with the beginning of the Church.

This peculiar work of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost is erased at the Rapture. So some work of the Spirit is bracketed, it’s added at Pentecost, it’s subtracted at the Rapture. So if we’re not clear about what the Holy Spirit does on Pentecost, we can’t be clear about what the Holy Spirit does other times. It’s true that the Holy Spirit is immutable, His character never changes; but it is not true that He functions the same way down through history. He has different ministries that operate at different times down through history.

Let's go back further in history and ask ourselves what was the Holy Spirit's ministry in the age of the Gentiles, before He made Israel? How did the Holy Spirit differ in what He did back here? Did He justify people differently? No, Noah was justified by faith. So again there's no difference in justification. Well then, what is the area of difference? The difference is two-fold. First of all, the content of the gospel changes. By this I mean the content of the message that is believed changes with dispensation to dispensation.

Let me illustrate. In the NT it's quite clear that we are trusting in the announcement that Jesus Christ has died for our sins. Yes; everybody agrees. In the OT, what was the content that people trusted in in order to be saved? The Abrahamic Covenant. Does it say anything about the cross in the Abrahamic Covenant? It does by implication, but they didn't know that. So what was it that they believed in all during the OT? They believed that YHWH was somehow going to solve their sin problem, but they didn't have a clue about the details. So the content of the gospel does change from dispensation to dispensation. It's not the same gospel in the sense that the content is identical. The content changes.

Here's where Covenant Theology gets into trouble because it always wants to make the content the same in order to preserve the way of salvation the same. It thinks that if salvation is always by faith then the content of faith has to be always be the same, the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and that's not true. Noah, back here, only had Gen 1-6 when he believed, that's the whole content of the gospel known to him in that day. Did they know about Israel? Was there a special nation? Was there any Shekinah glory and the Ark of the Covenant then? Were there any special Mosaic Law Code rules then? No. So something changed.

So back here we can say not only did the gospel content change, but most importantly is the will of God for believers; what God expected of believers to be obedient in one dispensation is not what He expects of believers to be obedient in another dispensation. In the OT the saints had, as part of the will of God for their lives, going to the temple to worship. They were ordered, and they would have been disobedient had they not done it, to go offer blood sacrifices at the temple. Is that true of the will of God for believers in the Church Age? No, it isn't. And even your most ardent Reformed person will agree that well no, I don't go to the temple to give blood sacrifice, that's OT.

Right, so the will of God is different from dispensation to dispensation? They're not so comfortable with that.

Now do we mean that the Ten Commandments are no longer for us? Yeah, Paul says all the Ten Commandments are out in the Church Age. Does that mean the content of the Ten Commandments, "thou shalt not steal, etc.," is out? No, because nine of the Ten Commandments are repeated in the NT. But they're repeated as teachings that come from the Lord Jesus Christ in heaven through the Holy Spirit to His Church. And the reason that there's a continuity of principle, of righteousness, from OT to NT is because of what? Because God doesn't change. God is the same yesterday, today and forever. So we expect to see some of the same principles.

So there is some continuity of principles from dispensation to dispensation but the specific details vary. Dr. Ryrie has said if you want an analogy of the difference from dispensation to dispensation, think of an administration. You have in the United States a President of one party, he's succeeded by a President of the other party, who's succeeded by a President of the other party, and you have switching back and forth every four to eight years. Is there a continuity between Presidents? Yes. Is their office in the same place? Yes. Do they operate on the same Constitution? Yes. Are their policies the same? No, the policies change.

That's what different about these dispensations, so trying to zero in on what we're grappling with here at Pentecost is we're asking the question is what difference in the will of God and the content of the gospel happened as a result of Pentecost? And the reason we want to ask that question is because the NT is specifically addressed to the Church. It is the OT that is addressed back here to Israel, and you're going to see conflicts between the two if you don't recognize that one is addressed to Israel and the other is addressed to the Church. There are different things going on here. The best example of our modern society is that in the Church there is no difference between Jew or Gentile or between racial groups. Is that true in the OT? Was God acting differently to Jews than He was Gentiles in the OT? Yes. Could there have been a believer in Assyria and a believer in Jerusalem and they both believed the same way, justified by faith? Yes. But is the will of God for this guy different from the will of God for this guy in his life? You bet it is; one was to

function as an Assyrian, the other one was to function as a Jew, each according to his national entity.

There wasn't any unified Church going on in the OT. There's a complete distinction between Jew and Gentile in the OT as far as the will of God goes. If you were living, say, in Babylon or somewhere out there in the Mesopotamian plain you had become a believer to the degree that you knew. In other words, here's the gospel that you would have had and your contemporary over in Jerusalem, he would have had this much revelation, but both of you had become believers. Both of you, if you were in fellowship with God were in fellowship only through the fact that in the future Jesus Christ would die for you both. You're over here in the Mesopotamian plain, this guy is over in Jerusalem, what's the will of God for this guy for his worship? Go to the temple. What's the will of God for this guy? Go to the temple? No, it's not addressed to him. The point you want to see is there are different areas in Scripture and they differ from dispensation to dispensation.

So when Pentecost starts and we have this formation of the Church, you're going to see some stresses, and that's why in Acts 10 Peter is all stressed out about going into the house of a Gentile and eating Gentile food—fellowship with Gentiles? Yuk! But see, the point is he's operating as an OT believer under the OT dispensational will of God which was don't eat with them. Now why did God say don't eat with them? Let's think about this. Why was God discriminating between believer Gentile and believer Jew? There was a discrimination going on. Why was there discrimination? Because the nation Israel had a mission to perform in history that must remain distinct from the mission and role of Gentile nations. So it wasn't just individuals, it was the mission of the overall nation. That's one of the reasons for the difference. As we go into the doctrine of the Holy Spirit, we want to think about this issue, what's changed as a result of Pentecost and the coming of the Holy Spirit? What new things have happened, what changes have happened from the OT way of doing business?

As we get into the doctrine of the Holy Spirit we want to remind ourselves that hey, John the Baptist talked about it, Jesus talked about it, and now the apostles are talking about it - the baptism of the Holy Spirit. That is what is so unique. It began on the day of Pentecost and is the key element that forms something very, very interesting as far as the Church is concerned - the

baptism of the Holy Spirit. There are many baptisms; it may surprise you but there are eight different baptisms in the Scriptures. There's the baptism of John that was water and wet. There is the baptism of Church Age believers and that's wet. There's the baptism of the Holy Spirit and that's dry. There's the baptism of fire and that's dry. There's the baptism of Moses, mentioned in 1 Cor and that was dry. There's the baptism of Noah mentioned in 1 Peter and it was dry. Baptism isn't always wet; baptism is used in other ways in the NT and also in the Bible at large.

But this particular baptism, this is a baptism of the Holy Spirit and it did not happen in the OT so this is something new and we want to see the implications of this. One of the implications of the baptism of the Spirit that you're going to see, if you turn to 1 Cor 12:13, is what this has done. Remember, this is Paul writing, he's discussing the baptism of the Holy Spirit and he's saying that it does something. Here's one of the things that's changed from the OT to the NT. 1 Cor 12:12-13, "For even as the body is one and yet has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ." He's inviting us to think about the Church in terms of what? The design of the human body. Here's an interesting picture. When God created man in the Garden of Eden, this is something, if you catch this, watch how this totally blows away any compromise with evolution. If things were really the way they are presented in the public school classroom, if things are really the way the so-called intellectuals that dominate our culture believe, then the form of our bodies is a result of what? Why is our body configured with two hands, two legs, and why do we have this configuration anatomically? It's a result of chance and adaptation under pressure, under environmental pressure. In other words, we happen to be here in our present body design by accident. The Bible says we are here in our bodies by divine design. So, what does that mean? It means that the original created body of Adam, the hands, the eyes, the toenails, the hair, the internal things, the heart, the kidneys, the blood vessels, all these parts were designed to be a picture of something that would later come into existence called the Church. And the Church is the body of Christ. So if the Church is the body then who is Christ? Christ is a part of the Church. What part is He? He's the head of the Church. Why is He called the head of the Church? Because the human body has a head. So the anatomy and physiology of the human body is not an accident, it is not a result of some stupid zero intelligent process that took millions of years to form. Every

human body you look at, no matter whether it is red, yellow, black or white, no matter whether they're a believer or not, every one of them is a picture of the Church. And so the human body is that which was built by an instantaneous act of God putting together the chemicals, forming them, framing them and breathing into them a human spirit was done so for the express purpose that it would teach us this truth about the Church. What do you mean you don't understand the Church? You have a human body don't you? Well, that's the analog to what the Church is. Your human body is a representation of the Church.

And then he says in verse 13, "For by one Spirit we were all baptized into" that one body. Now this is heavy stuff in the NT and it's very difficult to grasp his point. This is not easy stuff. But the Church is a body of some sort that is analogous to a human being's body, and the Holy Spirit has put you, at the instant you trusted in Jesus Christ, into this Church thing. This is not joining the local Church, this is not going through a ritual baptism at this point; the ritual is there but the ritual commemorates this event, it's not the event itself. It reminds us of the real baptism, the Spirit baptism at the moment of faith. By the "Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit." So he says there's unity, there's only one body of Christ, but verse 14, "For the body is not one member, but many," there's also diversity, we're not all the same part of the body. So whatever happened on the day of Pentecost, this baptism of the Holy Spirit started something new: the formation of a body that parallels our human body called the Church. And this is not Israel, this is something altogether different. The nation Israel is never likened to a human body like this. This is something new that is formed by the baptism of the Spirit and it has implications for our spiritual life. You can't just gloss over the differences between Israel and the Church. The analogies of Israel are not the same as the analogies of the Church and therefore the functions of Israel are not the same as the functions of the Church.

So we have the baptism of the Spirit, that's Church truth. Let's turn to Romans 6 and you'll see there's a lot of stuff associated with this baptism of the Spirit. We'll get into it more but we're just showing that there really is a difference and involved with this difference is a different spiritual growth. In Rom 6 he's addressing spiritual growth; how we advance in the Christian life, and he says, "What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace

may increase?" By the way, the fact that he has to answer the question tells you that Paul taught grace so heavily that certain people turned it into license. That is not what Paul intended to do. And the danger is, this is always the danger, the teacher will harp on something so much that the student will take it and push it one step farther. The danger with doing that is now the student is in error. That's what happened after the Protestant Reformation. The Protestant Reformers taught that justification is by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone; works do not enter the equation. And the Catholic Jesuits countered this by saying, now, wait a minute here, if you tell people that it's all grace, it's all faith and it's all Christ and they don't have to do anything and you're giving them all this assurance then the people are going to say, alright, I'm going to heaven so now I can go out and raise hell. That was the counter attack the Jesuits made against Protestants. And unfortunately the Protestants didn't come right back and say, yes, that's exactly what we're teaching. We are teaching that at the point of trust in Jesus Christ you're forever saved and you have the freedom to live your life however you want after that. What they should have added was that if you are a genuine believer and you are now His child and you go out and raise hell then He has a little thing called the rod that He'll use to straighten you out. So yeah, you can live that way, but just know God is a disciplinarian. You're in His house now and He will lower the boom. God's discipline can be very, very nasty and very painful. But instead of coming out with that truth they said, oh, yeah, we see your point and by gosh, we don't want people going out and abusing grace and using it as a license to sin and so they backed off and started compromising and said well, if somebody does this sin or that sin then it shows that they weren't really a Christian to begin with. It was a compromise.

Now it's true you can have the wrong object of faith. We're not denying that someone can believe in a false Christ. But the answer to that is not to put everybody's faith in jeopardy and start running around doing fruit inspections. The answer to that is, hey, let's preach a clear gospel, let's get a clear view of who Jesus Christ is and what He did and that will clear up what we're talking about here.

So the baptism of the Holy Spirit in Romans 6 is tied in with this problem of believers abusing grace and using it as a license to sin. Put another way, since Jesus Christ has cleared us of all our sin once for all should we now go

on sinning so that the grace looks like it's covering an even bigger pile of sin? Verse 2, Paul answers, "May it never be! How shall we who died to sin still live in it?" He's saying it's preposterous to think that. "Or do you know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death?" So here's the word baptize and he's tying in not sinning with this baptism. So something has changed now that we've been baptized into Christ. We are not the same people we used to be. We are different. Verse 4, "Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, in order that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life." And notice it starts with past tense and it moves to present tense. Somehow we are now new people, baptized into Christ and united with Him in His death and are now in union with the resurrected, ascended, seated Lord Jesus Christ to live a new spiritual life.

This is heavy stuff. Romans 6 says not only are we now in union with the resurrected, ascended, seated Lord Jesus Christ, who is sitting at the Father's right hand, but we were in union with Him when He died on the cross. How could anyone before the cross be in union with Him on the cross? The cross hadn't happened yet. So there's a historical difference that centers on the cross and it's associated with the baptism of the Spirit on Pentecost.

He says you have been baptized into Christ Jesus, even into His death. This is Rom 6. What chapter comes before Rom 6? Rom 5, the greatest theological passage in the entire word of God. This is a theological crux. What theology did Paul introduce in Rom 5 that gives you the basis for where he's going in Rom 6? Turn back to Rom 5:12. We begin to see something here, and this is where you get in real trouble if you're not going to take a literal approach to all of Scripture. People who get greasy in their handling of the early chapters of Genesis are going to get real greasy in Rom 5:12 and it's going to radically distort your theology in a very bad and serious way. In Rom 5:12 he goes all the way back to Adam and what does he go back to in Adam's life, what event in Adam's life? The Fall. "Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned— 13for until the Law sin was in the world; but sin is not imputed when there is no law," in other words, people don't die because they broke the Mosaic Law, people died before the Mosaic Law was given. People don't die for committing their first personal sin, they die because they somehow sinned

in Adam. They were united with Him way back then in the garden when he sinned, therefore we are dying because of the sin we committed in union with Adam! All of us are conceived under a sentence of capital punishment. It always amuses me; people say oh, I don't believe in the sentence of capital punishment. Friend, we're all under capital punishment. It's not a question of whether we will die or not, we're all going to die, barring that one generation that is going to escape capital punishment at the rapture. Outside of that everybody's under a sentence of capital punishment. Try that one in conversation and see what kind of discussion precipitates.

In other words, there is a single, universal cause of death and it's the sin that all people committed in union with Adam in the garden. Now if there is a single, universal cause of death then doesn't Rom 6 start to make more sense? That there is a single, universe cause of life and it's being in union with Christ on the cross. This is an inescapable and very elegant truth being articulated by Paul here. As the cause of death is our union with Adam in sin so the cause of life is our union with Christ in His death for sin.

We are now in Christ totally new people, the old is gone, and the new has come. We have been transferred from being in Adam to being in Christ, not only in His death, but also in His resurrection, ascension and session at the Father's right hand. The repercussions of these truths for the life of Christ, the indwelling Christ and the unique way of living the Christian life all flow out of this. But what I'm getting at is there's something very profound going on here with this baptism of the Spirit that marks the Church as different from Israel.

Let's shift to a second line of evidence that something distinct from Israel has formed. Not only do we have the baptism of the Spirit coming on Jews, Samaritans and Gentiles but we have the unique phenomena that accompanied this coming of the Holy Spirit—miraculous speaking in languages and amazing works of bodily healing. These phenomena were all given as signs to authenticate the apostle's message about Jesus that would go out to the remotest parts of the earth.

Think of the languages. Why all of a sudden do you suppose that the witness went out in all kinds of various languages? To show what about Christ? That He is for all men, all cultures, all languages. He isn't confined to people who

speaking Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek. The gospel can be accurately spoken in all the languages of the world; God intended it that way. How do we know that? It goes back to the Tower of Babel. Who divided the languages in that day? God. Did God somehow commit a big boo boo because centuries later He now has all these people groups speaking different languages and His gospel can only be communicated in one language? No, that's what Islam does. Islam claims what? That Allah can only communicate accurately in Arabic. The demand of Islam is that if you really want to know Allah's word you've got to learn Arabic because Allah only speaks in Arabic, period! He doesn't speak in English. That's why the lady from Iran became a Christian; she was six years old, her daddy was one of the leading theologians in Iran and she had the sense at age six, living in this theology professor's home to ask herself, wait a minute, I am an Iranian, I speak Farsi, that's my language, and if Allah can't speak to me in Farsi, then Allah's got a speech impediment and why would I believe in that kind of a God. I want to talk to a God who can speak in Farsi. And she went down to the corner library one day in downtown Tehran and stumbled on a little book, and that book turned out to be the Bible written in Farsi. That's how she became a Christian. God used that. The gospel is for every person, every language, everywhere.

Then we have prophecy. What's the purpose of prophecy? The purpose of prophecy is to reveal new truths. There was a whole new set of revelation that had to be given, so that's why we have prophecy. And we have the miracles and the signs that were given to authenticate but the point I want to key in on is that these signs and miracles were temporarily given to the Church. This is a controversial topic, I know, but this is the classic orthodox position. The church has always believed from the earliest times that these gifts ceased. That during the foundation period of the Church these gifts were active but they ceased and are not clearly active at all down through church history.

Now careful! Be careful here. This is not saying that miracles ceased. It is not saying that God doesn't heal today. It's saying that you do not have apostles that can toss their handkerchiefs on people and they get healed. That happened, there were mighty works of power done through the apostles early in their careers. That sort of miracle ceased. The question is why. I want to take you quickly to some verses. Turn to Heb 2:4, I want to give you some food for thought. There are some serious logical consequences that come out if

you do not believe in cessation. In Heb 2:4 notice the verb tenses. Hebrews is written about AD67, so it's one of the last NT books written. Verse 3, "how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation? After it was at the first spoken through the Lord, it was confirmed to us by those who heard." Then it says in verse 4, "God also testifying with them, both by signs and wonders and by various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit according to His own will." That is a clause that amplifies the previous main verb which is found at the end of verse 3. What is the main verb found at the end of verse 3? It "was confirmed ... by those who heard." Is that present tense or is that a past tense? That is a past tense, meaning that the confirmation of the gospel by these miracles was completed before the time the Book of Hebrews was written. And that confirmation is over, done, out, finished. It was not still continuing and the author of Hebrews apparently never observed them personally. They had ceased or were, at the very least, dying out and by the end of the 1st century came to a halt.

With not much time left let me quote another observation by Alva McClain of the gradual cessation that took place. This is significant and if you read Acts and the epistles carefully you'll see this shift. "In the fifth chapter of Acts "every one" of the sick who were brought from various cities to Jerusalem "were healed" by the apostles (5:16). Twenty five years later we find the greatest of all the apostles being denied his own earnest prayer for a well body (II Cor. 12:7-9). And as we near the end, we hear him advising Timothy to take a little wine for his "often infirmities" (I Tim. 5:23). Still later we learn that he has left another beloved worker "sick" at Miletum (II Tim. 4:20)... At the beginning and through the history of the Acts there were special and miraculous gifts by which divine revelation was channeled to men. These are named by Paul as the gifts of "knowledge," "prophecy," and "tongues" (I Cor. 12:8-10) but in the same context he warns that they will "cease" (1 Cor 13:8). The permanent things will be faith, hope, and love (vs. 13)."

So not only does the emphasis shift from Israel to the Church in the book of Acts; Acts also reports all these exciting miracles gradually phased out. Now the authority is vested in this book.

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