

Sunday, January 6, 2012—Grace Life School of Theology—*Grace History Project*—Lesson 87 Early Mid-Acts Leaders of the 1920s: C. R. Stam

Introduction

- In addition to Harry Bultema and J.C. O’Hair, another important preacher that came to understand aspects of mid-Acts Pauline dispensationalism during the 1920s was Cornelius R. Stam.
- In this lesson we want to consider the background of Pastor Stam and how he came to understand the word of God rightly divided. Fortunately, Pastor Stam left a host of information behind to help the student of history understand his personal background and dispensational thinking. For the purposes of this lesson we will consider the following points:
 - Who Was C.R. Stam?
 - Pauline Truth is Understood

Who Was C.R. Stam?

- In 2003 the Bearan Bible Society published *The Memoirs of Pastor Cornelius R. Stam*. Much of the biographical information contained in this lesson has been gleaned from this resource.
- Peter Stam was born in the Netherlands in May, 1866 and grew up to be an old-country comedian on account that his father ran a theater in North Holland. According to Cornelius, his father never heard the gospel preached in self-righteous North Holland. “There was no radio or TV in those days, and very little gospel literature in his part of the country. Indeed, the local state church was so liberal that on Sundays they alternated between a Protestant minister, a Catholic priest and a Jewish rabbi.” (Stam, *Memoirs*, 13)
- In 1889, at the age of 23, Peter Stam came to America. Upon arrival Peter boarded with a Dutch family in Patterson, NJ where he was first exposed to the Bible. The family he was boarding with would read the Bible together every night after the evening meal. Eventually Peter left the boarding house complaining that he did not want to “pay board money to hear that book read.” So, to get away from the Bible and learn English faster, Peter took up boarding with an English-speaking family in Hackensack, NJ. (Stam, *Memoirs*, 14)
- In the process of time, while sitting on a park bench, struggling to understand an English magazine, Peter asked an elderly woman sitting on the end of the bench the meaning of a word. She surmised that he was from Holland and offered him a book to help him learn English faster. When Peter realized that he had been handed a copy of a parallel Dutch/English Bible he told Cornelius that he almost threw it in the garbage because he did not like to be insulted by what he read. Peter’s reading of the Gospels, Acts, and the Epistles of Paul led him to acknowledge himself as a sinner and to trust Christ as His Savior. His life was revolutionized and he immediately began to tell people that he had been saved. (Stam, *Memoirs*, 14-15)

- Thinking that Baptist, Presbyterian, Reformed, Methodist, Lutheran, and so on were just names like Philadelphia, Chicago, and San Francisco, Peter decided to join the Christian Reformed Church. It was also around this time that Peter Stam married Elizabeth Alleta Alida Gertrude Willems, a descendent of the Huguenots. (Stam, *Memoirs*, 15-16)
- Cornelius R. Stam was born on May 27, 1908. (Stam, *Memoirs*, 17) In 1916 at the age of fifty when Cornelius was only 8 years old, Peter Stam retired from full time employment to found *Star of Hope Mission* and devote his life to city missionary work. According to Cornelius his father contributed heavily of his own funds to invest in a big livery stable in the heart of Paterson, NJ to house the mission. It had a 125 foot frontage and was two stories high; Peter and some helpers gutted the whole thing and rebuilt it to house *Star of Hope Mission*. Once completed, the building had a large auditorium, a suite of five rooms for administrative offices, twelve private rooms for staff members, and two large meeting rooms capable of seating between 60 and 70 for smaller meetings. The auditorium alone seated some 500 people, however, by adding chairs to the aisles and balconies, crowds of 900 could be accommodated at the mission. (Stam, *Memoirs*, 37-38)
- In his *Memoirs*, Pastor Stam recounts that he and his brother John were under deep conviction of their sins in their early teens. One Sunday Evening they went to a meeting at the *Star of Hope* and heard Pastor T. Hudson preach the gospel with great clarity and power. According to Stam, it was later that night at home that he and his brother decided to trust that Christ died for their sins and rose again. (Stam, *Memoirs*, 29-30)
- Regarding his early education and work life, Pastor Stam recounted the following, “I was a hard-working boy at an early age. I never made it to high school, but I did skip two grades in grade school and then spent a year and a half at business school, so I started working at Paterson’s *Bank of America* when I was only 13. A few years later I switched to the *Citizen’s Trust Company*, but the work there was no easier. . . Fewer boys went to high school in those days, and fewer still to college. But soon I began working nights at the *Star of Hope Mission* and finally full time. Never after that did I ever apply for any position of any kind: business, pastoral, evangelistic, or otherwise. There just always seemed to be things that needed doing as the Lord opened one door of service after another.” (Stam, *Memoirs*, 33)
- Cornelius recalls that his father made a point of filling their home with the “right” kind of reading material in the house. Books by the likes of Ironside and Gaebelein were routinely read in the Stam household. (Stam, *Memoirs*, 35)
- At the age of 23 (1931), Cornelius married Henrietta, a graduate of *Moody Bible Institute*. She proved to be a valuable helpmeet for Cornelius for 41 until she passed away in 1972. (Stam, *Memoirs*, 47-48)
- “The *Star of Hope Mission* was not, strictly speaking, a rescue mission . . . basically the “Mission” was a Bible teaching and gospel center. Large audiences came to hear the Word of

God expounded by Bible teachers like Gaebelein, Ironside, Pettingill, Gray, Gregg, Barnhouse, Ottman and others. Also we had many widely known missionaries with us: Mr. Howard Taylor, the brother-in-law of J. Hudson Taylor, the founder of the *China Inland Mission*, and Bill Pontier of Africa, and Dr. Tom Lambie, the missionary to Ethiopia . . . As to men of God who visited our home, most of my brothers were married by the time our Bible Conferences reached their zenith, and John had gone to *Moody Bible Institute* so I was the fortunate one to be at home when most of these Bible teachers were with us. I shall never cease to thank God for the years I got to hear their discussions on doctrinal matters. A great deal was to be learned from these keen students of the Word.” (Stam, *Memoirs*, 51-54)

- “At the *Star of Hope Mission*, as at Fundamentalist churches all over the country, capacity audiences were gathering to hear the Word of God taught. The people would come, Bibles in hand, to see whether these things were so. Those were the days of great theological controversy—and of live, active churches. This, in my judgment, was America’s last real revival. It was not various forms of entertainment that drew the people, but the study of the Word along with Scriptural gospel preaching—and without all the entertainment that usually accompanies evangelism today to draw audiences.” (Stam, *Memoirs*, 53)

Pauline Truth Is Understood

- The Stam’s along with Harry Bultema were excommunicated from the Reformed Church for holding dispensational views with respect to the Rapture of the church (Stam, *Memoirs*, 57). In his *Memoirs* Cornelius recounts that this led to further light and understanding of the truth.
 - “Previously our whole family of ten had been excommunicated from our denomination because we believed in the imminent Rapture of the Church to be with Christ, and the Baptist pastor from whom we learned this truth would not accept us as members of his church because we had not been baptized by immersion. This led us to a more thorough study of water baptism, with the result that some of us, at least, were led to conclude that the so-called “great commission” and water baptism have no place in the program of God for the present dispensation of grace. And this, in turn, led us into the body of truth that Paul calls the mystery, the most precious truth in all the Word of God.” (Stam, *Memoirs*, 54)
- According to Chapter One of *The Controversy*, Pastor Stam came to understand the blessed truth of the mystery with its one body and one baptism in 1926 through the ministry of a New York investment consultant whom he does not name. “This brother was a frequent guest at our home, and as we discussed the Scriptures together, dad and several others of the family were convinced that the rite of water baptism had no place in God’s program for the Body of Christ, having been superseded by a divine baptism in which the Holy Spirit eternally and inseparably unites individual believers to Christ and His Body. I still have—and prize—a booklet which this friend later gave us on the subject. It was written by Pastor J.C. O’Hair and contained two messages,

one entitled *Jesus Christ a Minister of the Circumcision*, and the other, *The Twelve Apostles and Paul*.” (Stam, *Controversy*, 21)

- When *The Controversy* was originally published in 1963 Pastor Stam did not share the name of this man who shared these doctrines with the family. Shortly after becoming the Pastor of Preakness Bible Church in Preakness, NJ in 1930 Cornelius published a booklet titled, *Water Baptism, Is It Included in God’s Program for This Age?* Soon after the booklet was published (1932) the brother from New York contacted Pastor Stam and asked him not to tell others that he believed similarly with respect to water baptism. This meeting was followed by a second meeting in which this brother from New York asked Cornelius “not to press the subject further publically, warning me that if I did I would ruin my ministry in a short time. Furthermore, he argued that if I were an Ironside or a Gaebelien, I might ‘put it across,’ but I had not yet arrived at that position.” While the young Stam promised that he would not mention his name, he would not promise to never speak or write about the truth regarding baptism. (Stam, *Controversy*, 21-22)
- Later, when he penned his *Memoirs* in 2003, Pastor Stam shared the name of this anonymous man that introduced the Stam family to Pauline dispensationalism. His name was Mr. Erling C. Olsen, president of *Fitch Investors Service*, of New York City. Not only was Mr. Olsen a Wall Street broker but he was also a lay preacher. In 2003, Mr. Stam remembered Mr. Olsen fondly stating, “Erling was a dear brother and a dear friend of the family, who helped us to see more clearly the distinctive character of Paul’s apostleship and his ministry. . .” (Stam, *Memoirs*, 58)
- Prior to accepting the Pastorate of Preakness Bible Church in 1930, while he was still laboring with his father at *Star of Hope Mission*, the young Cornelius was a first hand witness to various candid theological conversations with some of the nation’s leading fundamentalist preachers. Pastor Stam recounts these days in his *Memoirs*:
 - “The men of God I have referred to showed keen insight as they discussed the Scriptures, but there was one subject on which they were far from agreed—indeed, on which, collectively and individually, they seemed confused. That subject was the so-called “great commission,” with its miraculous sign gifts, its message, and its baptism! These great men simply could not agree as to these matters.

Dad broached may a question to them, as gently as he could, but clear answers simply were not forthcoming, and the disagreement among them was pronounced. Dr. Barnhouse, for example, expressed surprise that dad would invite Dr. Arno C. Gaebelien to speak at the *Star of Hope*. “Do you know,” asked Dr. Barnhouse, “what Dr. Gaebelien believes as to baptism?” Such questions by one Bible teacher about another were by no means singular.

But, graciously, God used the confusion on these subjects to prepare us to understand more clearly the greater commission given to Paul, the glorious message of reconciliation, with its “one body” and “one baptism.”

We soon learned, however, that God has recovered lost Bible truths to faithful saints, not all at once, but one great truth at a time, and to the men referred to above it was evidently given to recover for the Church the “blessed hope” of the imminent, premillennial coming of Christ for his own—at a time when most of the denominations were either post- or pre-millennialists, or badly confused about the whole subject.

These men, therefore, preached against great opposition. Well do I remember when some telephone poles in Paterson bore signs with Dr. Gaebelein’s picture and the warning that his preaching might involve his hearers in the “error” or pre-millennialism.” (Stam, *Memoirs*, 55)

- During the early 1930’s Pastor Bultema in Muskegon, Michigan was going through a “baptism crisis” of his own and had asked Peter Stam to come to his church for eight days of special meetings to address the matter (we will study more about this in a future lesson). When the time came for meetings, Peter Stam was in Holland on business for the *Star of Hope Mission*. Rather than cancel the meetings, Bultema got approval from his board to have the much younger Cornelius (not clear on his exact age at this point) make the trip in place of his father. Cornelius recounts in his memoirs that during the opening hymn of the first Sunday morning service Bultema whispered in his ear, “There are 1200 people here this morning.” (Stam, *Memoirs*, 83)
- In *The Controversy*, Pastor Stam recounts how he was chastised by Dr. Grey Barnhouse for accepting the invitation to speak at Bultema’s Church.
 - “In June, 1933, Dr. Barnhouse, deploring the fact that I was scheduled to conduct a week of meetings on these subjects at the *Berean Church* of Muskegon, Michigan, asked me point blank whether any others among our mutual friends had accepted this “hellish heresy.” I then told him we had been led into this truth through the brother referred to above, but Dr. Barnhouse insisted that I was wrong and that this brother believed in the sprinkling of infants. He was certain of this since this brother had so often occupied his pulpit at the *Tenth Presbyterian Church* in Philadelphia and they had enjoyed close fellowship together.

This prompted me to write our brother directly about that matter. In his reply dated July 6, 1933, he said among other things, that he believed that infant baptism was “a relic of the Roman Catholic Church,” but was careful to add: “That is confidential, remember.” (Stam, *Controversy*, 23)

- The main lesson Cornelius learned from this experience was conveyed to his readers in *The Controversy*. “This experience showed me what small considerations sometimes serve to close the mouths of men of God to truths they believe and should openly proclaim. The brother in question was, at that time, the executive vice president of a New York investors’ service, and did not need to close his mouth or hide his convictions from anyone. But where financial need does not cause men to capitulate, “the fear of man” often does, and where “the fear of man” fails to

silence them, love of position and popularity often succeeds, as it did with certain spiritual leaders of our Lord's day." (Stam, *Controversy*, 24-25)

- By the late 1920s and early 1930s the battle lines within premillennial Fundamentalism were being drawn. Many who had rejoiced in the dispensationalism of *The Scofield Reference Bible* would not follow this new generation of dispensational thinkers as they pressed the resurgence of Pauline truth further. What was their stumbling stone? Water Baptism.

Works Cited

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