

Sunday, March 17, 2013—Grace Life School of Theology—*Grace History Project*—Lesson 97 Bible Study For Bereans: August, 1935 through December, 1935

Introduction

- Back when we first began discussing J. C. O’Hair in Lessons 85 and 86 we presented four major historical challenges to understanding the thinking of this important figure.
 - No known chronology.
 - Few works are dated.
 - Oral Tradition—legendary information.
 - Possible tampering by those who have reprinted O’Hair’s works.
- Major strides have been made in establishing the historical development of O’Hair’s thinking since Lessons 85 and 86 were originally taught. The following three tactics have been utilized to bring clarity to this situation.
 - Used dated sources and dating clues in other non-dated writings to piece together a general chronology.
 - Used advertisements in the back of O’Hair’s dated booklets to fill in the general timeline. This has allowed us to piece together a general history of O’Hair’s thought development.
 - Looked at the writings of O’Hair’s critics to help establish what he was teaching and when he was teaching it.
- Using these methods we have been able to bring great clarity to the development of O’Hair’s thinking over time. We have seen him migrate from a traditional Acts 2 position to what appears to be a hybrid Acts 28 position by early 1935.
- Beginning in August of 1935, O’Hair began publishing a monthly Bible study magazine titled *Bible Study for Bereans*. The magazine was issued from August, 1935 through July, 1937. For the historian, these magazines are a God-send because they allow us to see month by month over a two year period how O’Hair’s thinking changed. Furthermore, they are dated so there is no question as to where O’Hair stood theologically within any given month. Lastly, an analysis of the contents of these documents reveals a time of great changes in O’Hair’s thinking. In general we have observed the following periods of progression in O’Hair’s thinking throughout the years covered by *Bible Study for Bereans* that we will seek to prove over the next couple lessons.
 - Towards Acts 28 (August, 1935–December, 1935)—this period is characterized by pro-Acts 28 statements from the pen of O’Hair as he seems to be wading through his options after having largely rejected the traditional Acts 2 position. During this period, O’Hair appears to have not read either Bullinger or Welch very extensively despite having concluded that Acts 28:28 is very significant in the dispensational dealings of God.

- Anti-Acts 2 and Anti-Acts 28 Period—during this time period O’Hair and his companions are clearly against the traditional view of the church beginning at Pentecost. During this period it becomes clear that O’Hair and his companions have read Welch and Bullinger and begin to forcefully reject some of the major tenants of Acts 28ism.
- Towards Mid-Acts—having rejected much of what Welch and Bullinger have to say, during this period O’Hair begins the process of transitioning away from Acts 28ism towards the mid-Acts position.

Towards Acts 28

- The ideas expressed by O’Hair during this period have much in common with the views we observed in *Wrongly Deriding Christian Brethren* (early 1935) in Lesson 96.

Bible Study for Bereans (August, 1935)

- In “Test the Things That Differ”, O’Hair states the following about the significance of Acts 28:28.
 - “While Christ was on earth in the midst of Israel, and during the “Acts” period, while Israel’s temple in Jerusalem stood, and that Nation remained in their land; while God’s order was to the Jew first, there was a program of signs, visions, miracles, angelic visitations, healings, death judgments and religious ceremonies; but after Paul declared God’s judgment upon Israel, in Acts 28:25 to 28, about 63 A.D., there was a new order, ushering in the signless age of grace. I Timothy 5:23; II Timothy 4:20; Philippians 2:2. Is God’s program for today one of grace mixed with signs and religion, or a “signless” age of pure grace and no religion? Test the things that differ.”
- “The Program of the Book of Acts, Lesson 1” shows the same tension we have already observed in *Unscriptural Cathedrals*, and *Much, Little, No Water*. O’Hair is still exhibiting tension between Acts 2 and Acts 28 statements within the same context.
 - “In the light of this confession of the Apostle Paul, no one can prove Scripturally that the new movement was not the Church of God. Even those who insist that the Church of God existed before the Day of Pentecost must acknowledge that that Church had a new beginning on the Day of Pentecost after the Holy Spirit came down from heaven. Now we ask this question to provoke the student to prayerful, serious, thoughtful study: granted that the Bible teaches clearly that there was a new beginning of the Church of God on the Day of Pentecost, with the opening of the Book of Acts, can we not state with Scriptural authority that there was a new beginning of the Church of God with the close of the Book of Acts?”
- In “Fundamentalists Divided” O’Hair bemoans the fact that Fundamentalists do not recognize a dispensational change with the end of the book of Acts.

- “The dispensationalists declare that the dispensation of the grace of God began on the day of Pentecost, several weeks after Christ; that the commission of Mark 16:15 to 18 introduced that dispensation of the grace of God on the day of Pentecost, and which has continued to the present time and which dispensation will close with the rapture of the Body of Christ, in accordance with I Thessalonians 4:13 to 18. The dispensationalists are not only warm hearted but hotheaded in their determinate opposition to the ultra-dispensational teaching that God caused the Apostle Paul, after the close of the “Acts” period, to prevent a revised Church program; after that period not only to present Divine truth that supplemented the truth of the “Acts” period, but some new truth of that period.”

Bible Study for Bereans (September, 1935)

- “Beware of False Prophets” mentions *Wrongly Dividing* by Ironside and warns against man following.
 - “There are prophets, really saved men who make false accusations against their Christian brethren, with whom they disagree as to the application of II Timothy 2:15: “rightly dividing the Word of truth.” Being unable to answer their brethren with the Word of God, they resort to exaggeration and false charges as to their teaching. They try to intimidate Christians who are untaught and unestablished and keep them from obeying God’s Word as expressed in Ephesians 4:3 and Ephesians 3:9, by maligning and misrepresenting servants for the Lord who would do the will of God and lead Christians into the deeper truth of God. They scare poor ignorant believers with the cry of “Bullingerism.” An example of this is the ungracious and unjust statements in the recent booklet of a Fundamental brother, called *Wrongly Dividing the Word of God.*”
- In “Church Creeds,” O’Hair clearly states that he believes there to be a difference between Paul’s ministry before and after the close of the book of Acts.
 - “We believe it is altogether essential to distinguish between things that differ. One specific example is to know the difference between the call and ministry of the Twelve and Paul and to know the difference between Paul’s ministry before and after the close of the “Acts” period. We believe that members of Christ’s body should obey Ephesians 3:9 and Ephesians 4:3 to 6.”
- “Gleaning From the Book of Acts” contains statements that are still very traditional in nature – i.e., Acts 2. Speaking of the salvation of the Twelve Apostles, O’Hair wrote:
 - “They were saved before the new dispensation was ushered in on the day of Pentecost. We have been saved since the close of the book of Acts, since the days or years of grace the Lord extended to Israel after they had killed the Prince of Life and committed the unpardonable sin by blaspheming and rejecting the Holy Spirit.”

- Statements like this one indicate that O’Hair was in agreement with Sir Robert Anderson about the transitional nature of the book of Acts. We also observed this in the previous lesson.
- In “Lost and Recovered Truth” O’Hair makes a distinction between the Pentecost Church of Acts 2 and 3 and the Body Church of Ephesians 1:19 to Ephesians 2:21. This distinction between two different churches, one during the Acts period and a different one after the close of the book of Acts, is a hallmark view of Acts 28ism.
 - “Until students of the Word of God are willing to advance from 33 AD to 63 AD with the desolation of Israel, they cannot see the difference between the Pentecost Church of Acts 2 and 3 and Body Church of Ephesians 1:19 to Ephesians 2:21. So long as they insist on the baptism of the Pentecost Church, instead of the one baptism of the Body, they will not see, or make others to see the dispensation of the mystery.”

Bible Study For Bereans (October, 1935)

- The first thing that is notable about this edition of the magazine is that O’Hair introduced his audience to the writings of other authors: Harry Bultema, Charles F. Baker, Vincent Bennett, T. Leonard Lewis, Otis Sellers, and T. W. Wellard.
- In “Tolerance Without Compromise” O’Hair argues that his Fundamentalist brethren have no answers to the following questions. O’Hair further announced that these subjects were to be discussed at the Berean Bible Conference to be held at North Shore Church October 7-11, 1935.
 - “Those of us who are responsible for the messages which are printed in this Bible-study magazine state that our Fundamentalist brethren, whom we recognize as members of the One Body of the risen Christ to which we belong, cannot prove by the Word of Truth rightly divided:
 1. That the Body of Christ began historically on the day of Pentecost.
 2. That the nation Israel was set aside by God with their rejection of Christ before or at the time He was crucified.
 3. That the sign gifts of Mark 16:16 to 18 and I Corinthians 12:8 to 11 are for members of the Body of Christ today.
 4. That the Dispensation of the mystery (Ephesians 3:9) began on the day of Pentecost.
 5. That there was no difference between the gospel of the circumcision given to Peter and the gospel of uncircumcision given to Paul. Galatians 2:7 to 9.
 6. That there was no difference between God’s program for the Church in Paul’s message after Acts 28:28 and before that judgment was announced.
 7. That the One baptism of Ephesians 4:5 is water baptism.”
- “The Gospel, The Kingdom and the Church” by Charles F. Baker makes clear distinctions between the Gospel of the Kingdom and the Gospel of the Grace of God. In addition, Pastor Baker makes the following pro-Acts 28 statements:

- “THE CHURCH, WHICH IS HIS (CHRIST’S) BODY (Ephesians 1:22 and 23) is specifically said to have been a mystery hidden from the ages past and its truth first revealed to the Apostle Paul (Ephesians 3:1 to 9). This church is to be distinguished from the congregation of Israel (Acts 7:38), and from the church in existence when Christ was on earth (Matthew 18:17), and if it had its beginning at the time of the revelation of the Mystery, it is to be distinguished from the Church of God which existed during the Acts period. God has nowhere definitely stated when the Body of Christ began, but we do know that it was not before Pentecost, and that the full revelation of truth concerning the Body was not made until Paul reached Rome as a prisoner. The all important thing to know is that, as believers, we are members of His Body, made accepted in the Beloved and complete in Him, and even now seated with Him in heavenly places, that our citizenship is in heaven, from whence also we look for the Saviour, and that we are called upon to walk worthy of this vocation wherewith we are called, endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. This can be accomplished only as we recognize our great seven-fold unity: one body, one Spirit, one hope of our calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and one God and Father of all.”
- “The Dispensation of the Mystery” by Vincent Bennett contains the clearest Acts 28 statement in the October, 1935 issue.
 - “For the “Dispensation of the Mystery” special Divine choice was made of the instrument for the revelation and this peculiar ministry was committed to the Apostle Paul. But it was not made known until the crisis was reached in Acts 28 by the setting aside of Israel. . . In this dispensation “hearings”, “tongues” and other sign-gifts have ceased. These passed away with the setting aside of the people Israel (Acts 28:25 to 28) and connected with this distinct message, we are enjoined to keep the sevenfold unity, Ephesians 4:4 to 6. “There is one Body and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling: One Lord, one faith, one baptism; One God and Father of all, Who is above all and through all and in you all.” It is a great blunder to have Israel set aside before Acts 28:25 to 28 or to confuse the one baptism of Ephesians 4:5 with Israel’s water ceremony. Water could never add a sinner to Christ.”
- T. Leonard Lewis in his article titled “The Close of Acts” also makes Acts 28 statements.
 - “The Book of Acts very significantly closed at this place and then in the Epistles written after the statement of Acts 28:28, we find Paul explaining the Mystery, hid from other ages, but now made known: the Mystery among the Gentiles “Christ in you the hope of glory”; the mystery concerning the believer’s identification with the risen Christ seated in the heavenlies. . . When “the times of the Gentiles” were ushered in, after Isaiah’s first usage of our passage, governmental authority was taken from the Jew and given to the Gentile. When Paul finally quoted it in Acts 28:26 and 27, spiritual authority was taken from the Jews and given to the Gentiles. Soon thereafter the judgment fell and Jerusalem and the temple were destroyed and the Jews were scattered abroad in fulfillment of Luke 21:24; Matthew 23:37 to 39. We do seriously blunder to teach that Israel was set aside

with the death of Christ. God gave them years of grace in answer to the Lord's prayer on the cross. Compare Luke 21:20 with Matthew 23:38 and Acts 28:25 to 28 and decide whether Israel's desolation took place in 33 A.D. or after 63 A.D."

- The October issue contains partial quotations from *Do We Wrongly Divide the Word of Truth: An Open Letter to Harry A. Ironside* by Otis Q. Sellers. O'Hair quotes the following sections from the Sellers letter in *Bible Study for Bereans*: "Did Israel Fall at the Cross," "Concerning the Actual Words of Christ," "Concerning Mark 16 and the Present Dispensation," and "Concerning Miracles in Acts." Presently we have on our desk a complete copy of Brother Sellers' letter to Ironside. An examination of the document reveals that it is very Acts 28ish in its thinking. Brother Sellers maintains the following positions: the dispensational boundary should be drawn in Acts 28, defends Bullinger's postscript theory with respect to Romans 16:25-27, and that the revelation of the mystery concerning the body of Christ was not made known during the Acts period. (Sellers, 16-26)
- O'Hair again demonstrates agreement with Sir Robert Anderson about the transitional nature of the book of Acts in "Gleanings From the Book of Acts, Part 2." He also once again demonstrates tension in his thinking. This tension shows in the conclusion where O'Hair raises many questions but offers no answers.
 - "Concerning the Book of Acts, Sir Robert Anderson, one of God's most gifted Bible teachers, declares, in his "Silence of God": "My contention is that the Acts as a whole is the record of a temporary and transitional dispensation in which blessing was again offered to the Jew and again rejected." "The right understanding of the Acts of the Apostles . . . a Book which is primarily the record, not as commonly supposed, of the founding of the Christian Church, but of the apostasy of the favoured nation." . . . The Law dispensation was temporary and parenthetical. Galatians 3:19; Hebrews 8:11 to 13. So also is the Dispensation of the Mystery. Ephesians 3:1 to 11; Ephesians 4:9 to 12; Colossians 1:24 to 28. There was an overlapping of the Law dispensation into the "Acts" period, during which period even Paul was authorized to become as one under the Law to those who were under the Law, while God's order was "to the Jew first." I Corinthians 9:20; Acts 13:46. This ceased with the revelation or the proclamation of the Dispensation of the Mystery. . . In closing, let us suggest that we diligently search the Scriptures and carefully consider this question lest we thoughtlessly or hastily answer this question; "what new Divine movement began on the day of Pentecost?" Was it the birthday of the Church which is His Body? Was it the beginning of the dispensation of the grace of God, mentioned in Ephesians 3:1 and 2? Was it the beginning of the dispensation of the mystery? Ephesians 3:9. Was it the beginning of a new Jewish or Israelitish church or the continuation of the same church under a new covenant? Just what began on the day of Pentecost?

Bible Study for Bereans (November, 1935)

- In “Gleanings From the Book of Acts, Part 3” O’Hair claims that there is no proof that the dispensation of grace, or the body of Christ began on Pentecost.
 - “. . . that there was no message of grace and mercy being preached to Gentiles, and that in these chapters there is not one verse or sentence to intimate in any way that the Body of Christ, “The dispensation of the grace of God” or “the dispensation of the mystery” began with Pentecost. . . These few remarks about Israel and their temple some years after Peter’s name had disappeared from the “Acts” record should help us to better understand our consideration of the ministry of Peter and the Eleven to Israel, in chapters three to seven, and to appreciate the place of Israel before God during these, and subsequent, chapters in the Book of Acts, until the judgment of Acts 28:25 to 28.”

- O’Hair sets forth twelve propositions with respect to body truth in “Some Simple Thoughts Concerning Body Truth.” For our purposes we will only consider a few of the most important statements.
 - “THIRD—IN EPHESIANS 1:22 AND 23 WE READ OF THE CHURCH WHICH IS HIS BODY. IN COLOSSIANS 1:24 WE READ “FOR HIS BODY’S SAKE, WHICH IS THE CHURCH”. THE EPISTLES TO THE EPHESIANS AND COLOSSIANS WERE WRITTEN AFTER THE CLOSE OF THE BOOK OF ACTS, WHEN PAUL WAS A PRISONER OF THE LORD JESUS CHRIST. Ephesians 3:1. NO OLD TESTAMENT PROPHET EVER FORETOLD ANYTHING CONCERNING THE BODY OF CHRIST. IT WAS PURPOSED IN CHRIST BEFORE THE FOUNDATION OF THE WORLD. . .

 - NINTH—IN EPHESIANS AND COLOSSIANS WE LEARN THAT THE HOLY SPIRIT SPEAKS OF THE MYSTERY IN CONNECTION WITH THE BODY OF CHRIST. THE WORD “MYSTERY” MEANS “SECRET”. IT IS APPARENT THEN, THAT UP TO THE TIME THAT PAUL WROTE EPHESIANS AND COLOSSIANS, GOD HAD KEPT THE TRUTH CONCERNING THE BODY OF CHRIST A SECRET. IT WAS GOD’S SECRET.”

- The last article in the November edition is titled “Divided Unity” and it also shows signs of Acts 28 thinking.
 - “There is one Body. There are several churches in the Bible, but God has one and only one Church for today. That Church is the Body of Christ. This Body is clearly described in Ephesians and Colossians; but not in any other Book of the Bible. Christ had a little flock while He was on earth. Luke 12:32 and 33. That was a kingdom flock different from the Body of Christ as to hope and calling. They were not preaching the Glorious Gospel of the Blessed God, which was committed to Paul’s trust. I Timothy 1:11. They knew nothing whatever of the Body of Ephesians and Colossians. They were instructed by their Messiah as to Israel’s kingdom hopes and given the gospel of the kingdom.”

Bible Study For Bereans (December, 1935)

- “Some Questions and Scriptural Facts For Meditation” previews an article that was to appear in the January 1936 edition of the magazine by Charles F. Baker. In this article Pastor Baker was arguing: How could the last days of Joel’s prophecy be the beginning of the church?
 - “Read the message of our brother Chas. F. Baker in our January edition. He is going to show in that message the folly of teaching that Peter’s “last days” Kingdom Message on the day of Pentecost was the “first day” of the Body of Christ. How could Joel’s “last days” mean the Body’s “first days”? If we teach that the Kingdom of heaven, proclaimed in Matthew, Mark and Luke, has been postponed until after the Body of Christ has been completed and removed from earth, then why not teach that the “last days” proclaimed by Peter and the Eleven have been postponed until after that Body has been completed? If the Body of Christ was not prophesied as having anything to do with Israel’s “last days”, why have that Body begin historically when the “last days” message was proclaimed?”
- Vincent Bennett wrote a piece for the December issue titled, “Brief Studies in Ephesians” in which it is very clear that the mystery concerning the body of Christ was not made known until Paul’s Epistle to the Ephesians after the close of the book of Acts.
 - “Paul’s later Epistles have a distinct message for this age. In them is found truth for us concerning the Church which is His Body, as distinct from kingdom truth for Israel. May God reveal to us what is the hope of our calling, character and destiny! To this end we are going to study the Epistle to the Ephesians which was written by the Apostle Paul during his imprisonment at Rome, after the final rejection of Israel and the judicial sentence in Acts 28:27 and 28—“For the heart of this people is waxed gross and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes have they closed: lest they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them. Be it known therefore unto you, that the salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles, and that they will hear it.”
- In “The Lord’s Supper” O’Hair attempts to argue that the Lord’s Supper is for the church despite having articulating many views that would seem to suggest otherwise.
 - “For several reasons some Christian brethren teach that the Lord’s Supper is not for the observance of members of the Body of Christ in this present dispensation when it is surely the Christ-given responsibility of every believer to make all see what is the dispensation of the mystery, in obedience to Ephesians 3:9. They say that the Lord’s Supper is not mentioned in any of Paul’s Prison Epistles, in which are set forth the hope and calling of the Body of Christ; that the Lord’s Supper was a religious ordinance which had its rightful place in the “Acts” transitional period, while the Nation Israel was on trial; but that it ceased with signs and water baptism. . . The contention of these Christian brethren is, that the Lord’s Supper must be eliminated from this period of special Gentile

favor by the same exegesis and dispensational principle that is employed for the elimination of the sign gifts of I Corinthians 12:8 to 11, and the water baptism of the “Acts” dispensation, from God’s program for the Body of Ephesians and Colossians. They also teach that “till He come” in I Corinthians 11:26 had no reference to the calling on high of the Body of Christ, but had reference to another aspect of the Lord’s coming. So far as I know, only one of these Bible teachers, who has given up the Lord’s Supper for the Body of Christ, teaches that the Church of God of the Second Chapter of Acts is identical with the Body of Christ in Ephesians and Colossians. They differentiate between the Pentecostal Church of God and the Church which is Christ’s Body. But all claim that the Church of Ephesians and Colossians has no connection with Israel’s New Covenant, but that the Lord’s Supper has, and therefore the Lord’s Supper should be eliminated with water baptism by the same application of the principle set forth in II Timothy 2:15, “rightly dividing the Word of truth”. I am here submitting several objections to the arguments of these Christian brethren, although agreeing with them that during the transitional “Acts” period, when the believers had not the several hundred written Scriptures telling of the death and coming again of Christ, the Lord’s Supper may have been more needed as a reminder of the finished work of the Son of God, than it is today.”

Works Cited

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