

The Body of Christ Its Beginning and Maturity



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The Body of Christ began with Paul prior to the writing of his first epistle. Of his 13 epistles, 6 of them (the number of imperfection) were *foundational* epistles – written in the infancy/adolescence stage of the Body of Christ. The last 7 were the *perfection* epistles (7 being the number of perfection). These final 7 were written to the Body of Christ in its maturity.

Acts 13 marks the beginning of the Body of Christ,¹ and Acts 28 marks its maturity and breaking from Israel. During the period covered by the book of Acts, in which Paul's first 6 epistles were written, the Body of Christ had a *primary* relationship with Israel, as a “minor” does with its mother and father (Abraham being the Body of Christ's father (Romans 4:16), and Jerusalem its mother (Galatians 4:26)). In this “infancy” (“minority”) the Body of Christ shared in Israel's “*spiritual things*” (Romans 15:27) – just as a “minor” shares in the identity and benefits of their parents. This included, for example, Israel's Passover (*i.e.*, “The Lord's Supper,” I Corinthians 5:7; I Corinthians 11:17-34), miraculous signs and gifts (such as “tongues,” I Corinthians 12:10; “miracles” and “healings,” I Corinthians 12:28, etc.), and “hope” (I Thessalonians 4:13-18; I Corinthians 15:52²).

1. When the Body of Christ began may not be the important question. The more accurate and poignant question may be, “What letters are for the Body of Christ today?” To assist us in answering this, we need to ask ourselves one simple question: “Is the middle wall of division up?” (*cf.* Ephesians 2:14). We can do this by asking other questions such as:

- Was the Jew first?
- Were there obligations to support Israel financially?
- Was there any value in circumcision?
- Was Israel being provoked to jealousy?
- Was anyone legitimately a minister of the New Covenant?
- Was being an heir or seed of Abraham of any spiritual value?

2. *Cf.* Acts 24:14-15; 26:6-7, 22-23; Acts 28:20.

Israel's spiritual blessings, which the Body of Christ has left behind, are not a loss for us: the pinnacle of revelation committed to Paul far exceeds anything that ever belonged to Israel. Take their hope for example. We have been graciously granted a prior expectation (Ephesians 1:12), different from Israel's prophesied one. The expectancy of Paul's *early* epistles is not the *current* hope of the Body of Christ. In fact, the so-called "Rapture" teaching is actually a mixture of Israel's hope with pure religious fiction. Paul taught an earlier "*appearing*" of Christ in which we will be participants (Colossians 3:4).

At Acts 28, with the final casting away of Israel, the Body of Christ no longer had this "father and mother" relationship and came into its own as an adult, with its own *distinct* identity, blessings, callings and hope – completely apart from Israel. When the Body of Christ became an adult, it put away all the things from its childhood (its "*childish things*," I Corinthians 13:11) and became "*a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ*" (Ephesians 4:13).

While all of Paul's epistles are written to the Body of Christ, the early, "infancy/adolescence" epistles are no longer *strictly applicable* and must be read in the light of the latter, "mature/adult" epistles. This would be similar to a letter that you may have saved from your childhood (say, when you were 8 years old) that was written to you, but much of which is no longer actually *applicable* to you today – adulthood having made the difference.

According to Romans 15:4-13, the early ministry and epistles of Paul were founded on the Old Testament and Israel. Of necessity, then, Paul's early letters are filled with Old Testament quotations, while in His latter epistles they are nearly absent.

We mix the dispensations when we attempt to carry the distinct truths of Paul's latter epistles with his former ones. Dispensational truth relevant for our day was revealed by Paul after Acts 28 and is recorded in his latter epistles. The current "*dispensation of the Mystery*" was a secret and had been previously "*hid in God*" (Ephesians 3:9).

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