

GOD'S PROGRAM FOR THIS AGE

Acts 15:1-14 (text v. 14)

The book of Acts is a transitional book going from the dispensation of Law to Grace... from Peter to Paul... from Jew to Gentiles... from Jerusalem to the uttermost (Acts 1:8).

1. In the first seven chapters of Acts, the message of Christ has been preached exclusively to Jews. The church at Jerusalem was Jewish.
2. In Acts 8 the Samaritans (half Jew) hear the message.
3. In Acts 10 a Gentile hears the message and is saved (10:44-45).
4. In Acts 11:20-21, the first Gentile church is established in Antioch. This is where the name "Christian" originated (11:26).
5. Paul and Barnabas are the first "missionaries" sent out from the church at Antioch (13:2-5).
6. On their missionary journey there is a new direction in God's program (read Acts 13:44-48).

➡ A CONTROVERSY arises over the **question**— Must the Gentiles keep the Law of Moses to be saved (read Acts 15:1-6). Peter described how he preached the gospel to the Gentiles and they were saved by grace through faith (vs. 7-11 cf. Acts 10:43-44).

➡ In Acts 15:13-14, James sums up **God's program for this age**.

What is a "program?" It is a plan to reach a desired end. It is like an agenda:

- A program always indicates a starting point and a point of completion (i.e. radio/television program; exercise program).
 - When you go to a stage performance you are usually given a "program." It tells you what is going to happen next.
 - A computer program is a set of coded instructions that tells a computer how to operate certain functions.
- I. A VISITATION program—*"God at the first did VISIT the Gentiles..."*
 - ➡ God visited the Jews through Christ and they missed Him (Luke 7:16; 19:44).

- A. Since the Jews rejected God's visitation, God visited the Gentiles— Cornelius (see Acts 10). Cornelius was...
1. A religious man (v. 2)
 2. A God-fearing man (v. 2)
 3. A unselfish man (v. 2)
 4. A praying man (v. 2)
 5. A man who fasted (v. 30).
 6. A man who was unsaved (11:14).
- B. How did God visit Cornelius? Through His ambassador, Peter. That is how God visits the lost today—Through His ambassadors, YOU and I.
- ➡ *We are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you BY US, we pray you IN CHRIST'S STEAD, be ye reconciled to God" (2 Cor. 5:20).*
1. An "ambassador" is one who represents another in a foreign land.
 2. He promotes the interests / views of the one he represents.
 3. A rejection of an ambassador is to reject whom he represents.
 4. He assists those who wish to emigrate to his country. He shows the candidate the requirements and how to apply.
- C. Do you want God to visit your unsaved neighbor, co-worker, and loved ones? He will visit them as YOU visit them in Jesus' name. That is God's program today. Let's get out and VISIT the lost.
- II. A SEPARATION program—“...to TAKE OUT of them a people...”
- ➡ It's a “TAKE OUT” program (like at a restaurant)! God took Enoch out; Abraham out of Ur; Israel out Egypt; Elijah out in a fiery chariot; Jesus out.
- ➡ When a Gentile is saved, he is taken out from among the Gentiles and placed IN CHRIST—He is no longer a Gentile—He is a NEW CREATURE!

- A. Not everyone will be saved. Obviously, if He “takes out” of the Gentiles, some will not be taken out.
 - 1. Some will go to hell (Mt. 7:21).
 - 2. Two ways—Broad that leads to destruction / Narrow that leads to life.
 - 3. Only those in the Lamb’s Book of Life will be saved (Rev. 20:15).
 - B. God is a God of separation (Luke 12:51). Jesus came to deliver us FROM this present evil world.
 - 1. Separates the wheat from the tares.
 - 2. Sheep from the goats
 - 3. Professors from the possessors.
 - C. God wants us to live separated lives from the world (2 Cor. 6:17)—A peculiar people (Titus 2:12-14)!
 - D. One day, we will be literally TAKEN OUT in the rapture (1 Thess. 4:16-17).
- III. An IDENTIFICATION program—“...*for HIS NAME.*”
- ➡ Everything is for HIS NAME—Saved by His name (Acts 4:12); Preach His name; Pray in His name; Baptize in His name; DO ALL things in His name (Col. 3:17).
 - A. His name becomes our name— “Christ-ian” (Acts 11:26)

 - ➡ When the suffix “*ian*” is attached to another name, it identifies the person with whatever his name is attached to = “*ian*” means belonging to the family of; belonging to the country of: Italian; Egyptian; Arabian; Indian; Hawaiian; Columbian.

 - B. Marks of identification:
 - 1. How you talk. Galilean.
 - 2. How you dress.
 - 3. How you act.

C. Baptism is an outward expression of our identification with Him in death, burial and resurrection.

➡ In baptism we are saying, “I am not ashamed to be identified with Christ.” We are baptized in His name!

SUMMATION: We must be sure that our church program lines up with God’s program!

- Are we actively visiting the lost to bring them to Christ?
- Are we living separated lives?
- Do we bear any identifying characteristics that we belong to Christ’s family?