

**WHERE IS THE PROMISE OF HIS COMING?***Scripture Reading: Acts 3:19, 20; II Peter 3:4-15*

Not long after the resurrection and ascension of Christ, the apostle Peter made a fantastic offer to the nation of Israel: "Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the time of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord; And he shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you" (Acts 3:19, 20). This is no less than the offer of the kingdom, complete with the return of Christ!

Yet many years passed, and Christ did not come. In fact, some who had heard Peter preach eventually began to scoff and question the very Word of God. Peter's answer to these and all who wonder why Christ did not come is that "The Lord is not slack concerning his promise" (II Peter 3:9). He will indeed fulfill His promise some day (verses 10-13). Then in a remarkable verse, Peter points his readers to one who could truly give them insight into the delay of Christ's return: "And account that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation even as our beloved brother Paul also according to the wisdom given unto him hath written unto you" (verse 15).

Paul's epistles fully explain why the prophecies of Christ's return in power and glory have been postponed. It is so God can unfold the great mystery among the Gentiles: "For I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits; that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in" (Romans 11:25). After this, the prophecies will resume.

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*Notes:***THE CROSS:  
BAD NEWS OR GOOD NEWS?***Scripture Reading: Acts 2:23, 36, 37; I Corinthians 15:1-4*

The men of Israel were clearly in the wrong. Peter charged them with the very murder of Christ. "Ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain" (Acts 2:23b). Even in their unbelief, these evil men fell under conviction when they heard "that God hath made the same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ" (Acts 2:36b).

Imagine their predicament: the One they had murdered was come back to life and was not at all pleased with them. They responded much like anyone would, by crying out, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" (Acts 2:37b). Peter immediately told them to repent, for to them at the moment, the cross was "bad news." Even though the crucifixion was in the plan of God (verse 23a), those who carried it out were still guilty of a terrible crime.

But unto Paul was revealed an astounding truth: the cross which was bad news to the perpetrators is actually "good news" to all sinners! "Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel (good news) which I preached unto you...how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; And that he was buried, and that he arose again the third day according to the scriptures" I Corinthians 15:1,3 & 4).

You see, we are *all* responsible for putting Christ on the cross. "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23); but God, in His grace, has now revealed that the "bad news" of the death of His Son has become the "good news" of the gospel. For it is through that sacrificial death that our sin was purged, "that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus" (Romans 3:26).

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## DISPENSATIONAL GAPS IN SCRIPTURE

*Scripture Reading: Isaiah 61:1, 2; Luke 4:16-21*

Sometimes *rightly dividing the Word of truth* means looking for those *dispensational gaps* in Scripture. While our Lord was on earth, He demonstrated the importance of knowing where those gaps were. A good example of this is the record of His reading of Isaiah sixty-one. As it is found in our English Bibles, the Lord read until half way through Isaiah 61:2. "And he closed the book, and he gave it again to the minister, and sat down" (Luke 4:20a). The Jewish congregation expected Him to continue, for it says, "And the eyes of all them that were in the synagogue were fastened on him" (Luke 4:20b). Our Lord went on to explain why He stopped just where He did. "And he began to say unto them, This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears" (Luke 4:21).

The Lord fulfilled in His first coming all of the things mentioned in Isaiah 61:1 & 2a, up to and including, proclaiming "the acceptable year of the Lord." This is what the gospel of the kingdom was all about. The acceptable year of the Lord was the great year of jubilee which looked forward to the kingdom.

The "day of vengeance of our God" (Isaiah 61:2b) is a reference to the Second Coming of Christ which was yet future when Christ spoke--and still is. Even now, we are in that dispensational gap between the first and second half of Isaiah 61:2. This is what it means to "rightly divide the word of truth!" It is also important to recognize that there was absolutely no mention of this dispensation of the grace of God in Isaiah or by our Lord as He taught. This is because it was still kept a mystery until revealed to Paul.

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## DISPENSATIONAL GAPS (Part two)

*Scripture Reading: Daniel 9:26, 27*

In this great prophecy of the seventy weeks, Daniel outlines the prophetic future of Israel beginning with the command to restore and rebuild Jerusalem and continuing until the end of the great tribulation. Most Bible scholars agree that the "weeks" here are seventy weeks of *years*, or 490 years. Yet historically, the 490 year period has expired long ago without all of these things coming to pass. Does this mean that Daniel's prophecy has failed to come true? Not at all! It simply means that Daniel's prophecy has been interrupted. Through a careful study of Scripture, it can be determined just where the prophecy was temporarily suspended.

In Daniel 9:26 we read, "And after threescore and two weeks shall Messiah be cut off, but not for himself: and the people of the prince that shall come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary; and the end thereof shall be with a flood, and unto the end of the war desolations are determined." These things were fulfilled with the crucifixion of Christ and, later, the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in A.D. 70.

However, the events of Daniel 9:27 have not yet come to pass. "And he [the 'prince' or antichrist] shall confirm the covenant with many for one week: and in the midst of the week he shall cause the sacrifice and the oblation to cease, and for the overspreading of abominations he shall make it desolate, even unto the consummation, and that determined shall be poured out upon the desolate." This verse awaits fulfillment in the seven years of tribulation and the glorious Second Coming of Christ. Until then, we live today in that dispensational gap between verses 26 & 27, where we *now know* the dispensation of the mystery (Ephesians 3:9) takes place.

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## DISPENSATIONAL GAPS (Part three)

*Scripture Reading: Hosea 3:4, 5*

“For the children of Israel shall abide many days without a king, and without a prince, and without a sacrifice, and without an image, and without an ephod, and without teraphim” (Hosea 3:4). The nation of Israel is thus described as a people “in limbo.” How the prophets and scribes must have puzzled over this one! In the Old Testament, Israel either worshiped according to the temple system or worshiped idols. In this verse, they have neither! Of course, some two hundred years after this was spoken, Israel found herself in captivity in Babylon under the very conditions described in our text.

Once again, the next verse describes a scene which has not yet come to pass. “Afterward shall the children of Israel return, and seek the LORD their God, and David their king; and shall fear the LORD and his goodness in the latter days” (Hosea 3:5).

To this very day, Israel awaits the fulfillment of verse five, for we are now in a dispensational gap between Hosea 3:4 & 5. As has been observed time and again, Hosea and the prophets utter not one word of the “dispensation of the grace of God,” neither a whisper of the great “mystery” truth which would one day be revealed to Paul the apostle of the Gentiles. This truth was “hid in God” not in the Old Testament Scriptures. Yet, one day this present age will run its course; and the prophecy of Hosea will resume, even as Paul confirms in Romans 11:26. “And so all Israel shall be saved: as it is written, There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob.”

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## ARE WE “SPIRITUAL ISRAEL?”

*Scripture Reading: Galatians 6:15, 16*

Covenant Theology teaches that the church has become “spiritual Israel,” and therefore Israel’s covenants are valid and binding on the church today. Paul’s epistles are sometimes called on to support this theory. One of these texts is Galatians 6:16. “And as many as walk according to this rule, peace be on them and mercy, and upon the Israel of God.” According to some, the “Israel of God” is actually the church. What does Paul mean?

Far from teaching that the church is Israel, Paul is actually distinguishing the two in this text. In the preceding verse, Paul writes, “For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing nor uncircumcision, but a new creation” (Galatians 6:15). This is a reference to the church which is His body, wherein physical circumcision is no longer the issue. To these, Paul writes, “And as many as walk according to this rule, peace be on them and mercy....” (Verse 16a)

At the time Paul wrote Galatians, there were still many “circumcision” saints living on the earth, still being ministered to by Peter, James and John (Galatians 2:9). They had believed under the kingdom gospel and were therefore still a part of the Godly remnant of Israel. So as *not* to leave these saints out, Paul continues his blessing, in verse sixteen, “and upon the Israel of God.” Here is a good example of taking a verse, or even a phrase, out of context and arriving at the exact opposite of the intended meaning.

No, the church today is not “spiritual Israel.” We have been given a new, heavenly hope and a new set of promises and blessings by the grace of God!

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