

## Lesson 21

### The Apostles Speak to Israel

The book of Acts follows the books of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John in the Bible. The book of Acts is like a sequel to the four gospels in that it tells what happened after those books. What happened to Israel after Jesus Christ rose from the dead and ascended into heaven? What did the apostles do? Did the apostles complete the commission given to them by Christ? We encourage you to read the entire book of Acts to find the answer to these and many other questions you may have. However, in these studies we will again focus on the same areas we have studied in the preceding lessons. These are the questions we will concentrate on: Was the nation of Israel still under the law after Christ died, rose from the dead, and ascended into heaven? Was Israel still God's favored nation? Were they still looking for a kingdom on earth? What gospel did they preach?

#### The Law

We have seen that God gave the Law to the nation of Israel in the Old Testament. This included such practices as the sacrificing of animals, circumcision, keeping the Sabbath Day, observing certain feast days, etc. We have also seen that Israel continued to live under this law during the time written of in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. When the book of Acts begins, Jesus Christ has already died on the Cross and risen from the dead. In chapter one of Acts He ascends into heaven. *Did the nation of Israel still live under the law after the death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ? Or did Israel now begin to live under grace and not under the law as spoken of in Romans 6:14?*

Many churches teach that the disciples were living under grace after Christ died. However, let us see how the book of Acts answers our question. We will concentrate mostly on the first seven chapters of the book of Acts at this time (the reason for this will be explained later), though we may briefly refer to chapters 8-28. First we should observe that nowhere in the first seven chapters of Acts does it say that Israel no longer lived under the law. Since they had been living under the law for hundreds of years, we would expect the Bible to tell us if there had been such a major change in Israel. However, there is not even a hint that the law had been set aside or replaced by grace.

On the other hand, there is considerable evidence that *Israel was still living under the law*. We read in Acts 2:46 that they "continu[ed] daily with one accord in the temple . . ." and in Acts 3:1 we find "Now Peter and John went up together into the temple at the hour of prayer, being the ninth hour." Thus, we see that the apostles did not begin to build Christian churches to worship in, but continued to worship daily in the Jewish temple in Jerusalem.

In Acts chapter fifteen we read about a dispute that arose concerning the law. Some were teaching, "Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved." Paul and Barnabas were accused of teaching that the Gentiles did not have to live under the law of Moses. "And the apostles and elders came together for to consider of this matter" (Acts 15:6). In this brief study we cannot write in detail about Acts chapter fifteen. However, we want to point out a few relevant facts.

1) In Acts 15, the debate was about whether the *Gentiles* had to live under the law. They did not discuss the question of whether or not the *Jews* had to live under the law. Of course, the Jews must obey the law! Everyone agreed on this point.

2) If Peter and the other apostles began to teach in Acts 2 that "ye are not under the law, but under grace," there surely would have been no dispute on this matter much later in Acts 15. When the Jews heard Paul and Barnabas preach they would have said, "This is the same thing Peter has been preaching since the Day of Pentecost (in Acts 2)." However, there *was* a great controversy about this issue (Acts 15:1-7). Clearly Peter and the others had never previously taught that the Gentiles were under grace, instead of being under the law.

Even later Paul returns to Jerusalem and is told by James, "Thou seest, brother, how many thousands of Jews there are which believe; and they are all zealous of the law" (Acts 21:20). Notice that this speaks of Jews "which believe" and they are all strictly living under the law of Moses. *The book of Acts clearly teaches us that Israel was still living under the law during the time of Acts 1-7 (and for some time after this).*

### **A Kingdom on Earth**

The Old Testament saints and the disciples in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John were not promised an eternal home in heaven. Instead, they were promised an everlasting kingdom *on earth*. *In the first seven chapters of Acts, are the disciples promised a home in heaven? Or are they still looking for God's kingdom to come to earth?*

"When they therefore were come together, they asked of him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?" (Acts 1:6). There is no doubt that the disciples were still looking for a kingdom on earth. There are some who teach that the disciples were ignorant or unbelieving when they asked the question in Acts 1:6. These teachers claim that the disciples did not understand the change in God's plans. Supposedly the disciples should have been seeking to go to heaven rather than looking for a kingdom on earth. However, the Bible tells us that these teachers, not the disciples, are the ones that fail to understand. The disciples had their understanding of the Scriptures opened before asking the question in Acts 1:6 (see Luke 24:45). After His resurrection, Jesus Christ taught the disciples about the kingdom of God for forty days (Acts 1:3). The disciples were not ignorant when they asked, "wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?"--they understood *what* God would do, but didn't know *when* He would do it. They knew that God had promised to send a Messiah to sit on the throne of David (Acts 2:30).

Please, also, read Acts 3:19-21. You will see that the disciples were looking for Jesus Christ to come down to earth. They were not expecting to be taken up to heaven. The promise was that Christ would come and restore all things on the earth after Israel repented and was converted. Therefore, we know that, during the time of Acts 1-7, the disciples were not promised that they would go to heaven. They were promised a place in the kingdom *on earth* spoken of by the Old Testament prophets.

### **Israel: The Chosen Nation**

In earlier studies, we have learned that God chose Israel to be His nation above all other nations. Israel held this special position in the Old Testament and this continued in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. *In Acts 1-7, does Israel still have a special position above all nations? Or have Gentiles been given a position of equality with the Jews?*

In considering this question, we remind the reader of Acts 1:6. It speaks of the kingdom being restored to *Israel*. Clearly the disciples thought Israel still held a special position. Reading the first seven chapters in Acts will confirm that the apostles were correct in their thinking on this matter. Peter and the other apostles were filled with the Holy Ghost (Acts 2:4) and when Peter preached he addressed the Jews who were dwelling in Jerusalem (Acts 2:5)<sup>1</sup>. As far as we can learn in the book of Acts, Peter's audience in Acts 2 was all Jewish<sup>2</sup>. If there were any Gentiles present, Peter did not say one word to them.

Peter speaks to "Ye men of Israel" in chapter three (verse 12). He says of them, "Ye are the children of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with our fathers . . ." (verses 25-26). Israel, not any Gentile nation, was addressed as the children of the prophets and the covenant. Peter speaks of Jesus Christ in chapter five when he says, "Him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins" (Acts 5:31). According to this verse, God exalted Jesus Christ to give repentance and forgiveness *to Israel*. *Everything written in Acts 1-7 leads us to conclude that Jews and Gentiles were not equal in the sight of God at that time. Israel still held their favored position.*

[In our next lesson we will continue our study in the book of Acts.]

## **Review Questions**

### **True or False**

1. The book of Acts comes after Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John in the Bible and tells what happened after the events in those books.
2. All churches today teach that the disciples continued to live under the law after Christ died and rose again.
3. When we read Acts 15, we find that everyone agreed that all believers were to live under grace, not under the law.

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<sup>1</sup> See also Acts 2:14, 22, 36

<sup>2</sup> Men came "out of every nation under heaven," but these men were all Jews. They had come to dwell in Jerusalem to wait for the Holy Ghost to be sent and for the Messiah to appear. The "proselytes" mentioned in Acts 2:10 were Gentile converts to the faith of the Jews. Thus, they were no longer considered to be Gentiles.

4. Believers throughout the Bible were promised an eternal home in heaven.

### **Multiple Choice**

5. In Acts 3:19-21 we learn that the disciples were taught that:

- a) Jesus Christ would return to earth and set up His kingdom in which all things would be restored.
- b) They would all be taken up to heaven.
- c) They no longer needed to sacrifice animals.
- d) Israel was no longer God's chosen nation.

6. Acts 1:6 show that:

- a) The disciples were ignorant of God's will at that time.
- b) The Church, the Body of Christ would soon begin.
- c) The disciples were still looking for God to establish His kingdom in Israel.
- d) The disciples couldn't understand the Bible.

7. God required Israel to keep the law:

- a) In Old Testament times
- b) Only when they sinned against Him
- c) When Christ was on earth (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John write about this time)
- d) During the time written of in Acts 1-7

### **Fill in the Blanks**

8. In Acts 1-7, Israel was still living under the \_\_\_\_.

9. In Acts 21, James told Paul that all the Jews that believed were \_\_\_\_\_ of the law.

10. "Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to \_\_\_\_\_?"

## **Lesson 22**

### **The Apostles Speak to Israel-Part 2**

In lesson 21 we have learned that in Acts 1-7: Israel was still God's favored nation, was still living under the Law, and still sought a kingdom on earth. We will now consider the question of what gospel was preached in Acts 1-7.

### **The Gospel Preached by Peter**

Many churches, seminaries, and Bible colleges teach that the Church, the Body of Christ began in Acts 2. This, they claim, is where the gospel of grace was first preached. Did Peter and the other apostles preach the gospel of grace in Acts 2? We will answer this question by looking at what Peter preached in Acts 2. Specifically we will examine this chapter to see what he preached about the death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ.

What did Peter preach about the death of Jesus Christ? Today, we preach the Cross as good news--the best news ever given to man! [See lesson seven to review the good news about the Cross] Is this the message we find in Acts 1-7? "Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain:" (Acts 2:23). "Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ" (Acts 2:36). Peter did *not* offer salvation through faith in the death of Christ. He did *not* preach the Cross as good news. Instead, he *blamed* Israel for crucifying the Lord. He warned them of the consequences of their action. The Cross was not a joy to the audience in Acts 2, but a cause for shame upon the nation.

What did Peter preach about the resurrection of Jesus Christ? Today, we preach that Christ was raised for our justification (Romans 4:25). No such thought is found in Acts 2! "Therefore being a prophet [David], and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him, that of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh, he would raise up Christ to sit on his throne;" (read Acts 2:29-31). Peter preaches that Christ was raised from the dead to sit on the throne of David. This speaks of the same kingdom promised in the Old Testament.

Finally, what did Peter preach about the ascension of Jesus Christ? Today, we preach the ascension as good news--Christ has been seated at the right hand of the Father. He is "far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion in the heavenly places (Ephesians 1:20-22). Again, this is much different from what Peter preached in Acts 2. "For David is not ascended into the heavens: but he saith himself, The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, Until I make thy foes thy footstool" (Acts 2:34-35). Peter's message was that Christ was seated at the right hand of the Father until the time comes for Him to crush His enemies. When Peter spoke of the ascension, it was not a joyous message as for us today. Instead, it was a warning of coming judgment!

The truth is that we cannot find the gospel of grace in Acts 1-7. We preach the Cross as the good news of salvation---Christ died for our sins. In Acts 2 the Cross was preached as a warning of judgment---the one you have crucified with your wicked hands is now alive and will return to judge His enemies.

### **Summary statement about Acts 1-7**

In lessons twenty-one and twenty-two we have learned the following about Acts chapters one through seven:

- 1) God's people continued to live under the law.
- 2) The hope of the disciples was that God's kingdom would come to earth.

3) Israel was God's chosen nation. He continued to speak to Israel in a way that He spoke to no other nation.

4) The gospel they preached concerned the establishment of God's kingdom on earth. Israel was blamed for crucifying the Lord and warned of coming judgment.

In this present dispensation of grace:

1) We are not under the law, but under grace (Romans 6:14).

2) We are promised an eternal home in heaven, not a place in a kingdom on earth (Ephesians 2:6; Philippians 3:20).

3) Israel is not favored above other nations today. There is no difference between Jew and Gentile as far as spiritual standing or blessing (Romans 3:9; 10:12).

4) We are to preach the gospel of grace that proclaims Christ's death as good news of salvation.

Chapters one through seven of the book of Acts are a continuation of the Old Testament account of "**time past**" (Ephesians 2:11). They give additional information about the time from **Moses to Christ (law to grace)** [See Romans 5:13-16]. The focus is still on "**the promise**" given to Abraham (Galatians 3:17). The disciples were still living under "**the law**" (Galatians 3:17).

Before leaving Acts, we must note a few important events recorded in this book. We have seen in previous studies that Israel was promised a kingdom in the Old Testament. This kingdom was declared to be at hand by Jesus Christ and the apostles. However, the kingdom had never actually been *offered* to Israel. In fact, it could *not* have been offered until Christ died on the Cross. The first time Israel was offered the kingdom was in Acts 1-7. In Acts 3:19-21 Peter preaches to "Ye men of Israel" and tells them they must repent [of their sin of crucifying the Lord]. He says that Jesus Christ will then return to earth and restore all things as the Old Testament prophets had promised. The stage was set for Israel to receive her kingdom.

However, the book of Acts tells a sad story about Israel. God's offer of the kingdom was violently rejected. The climax came in Acts 7:51-60 when they stoned Stephen to death. Israel resisted the Holy Spirit. They were guilty of betraying and murdering the Son of God. This decision by Israel's leaders was the act that Christ had warned about in Matthew 12:31-32. In Acts 7, Israel committed the sin that could not be forgiven---they had blasphemed against the Holy Spirit. (The disciples were all filled with the Holy Spirit in Acts 1-7, but Israel rejected the Holy Spirit as He spoke through the disciples.)

As Stephen was about to be stoned, he said, "Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God" (Acts 7:55). Why was Christ *standing*? We have already seen that He was *sitting* in chapter two. When reading through the Old Testament, we see that the Lord stands when it is time for Him to judge His enemies. "Arise, O Lord, in thine

anger, lift up thyself because of the rage of mine enemies: and awake for me to the judgment that thou hast commanded" (Psalm 7:6).

God the Father spoke to Israel in the Old Testament through the prophets. However, Israel killed the prophets. God the Son spoke to Israel when Jesus Christ ministered on earth (in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John). However, Israel crucified the Son of God. God the Holy Spirit spoke to Israel in Acts 1-7 when all of the disciples were filled with the Holy Spirit. Israel, however, resisted and blasphemed against the Holy Spirit. Israel had committed the unpardonable sin. The nation was ripe for judgment. [In our next lesson, we will find out what happened to Israel after Acts 7.]

### **Review Questions**

#### **True or False**

1. In Acts 1-7, all nations have equal standing before God.
2. Today we preach the Cross as good news for salvation.
3. Believers in this dispensation of grace should consider the ascension of Christ to be a warning of judgment.
4. God set aside the law when Christ died on the Cross. Throughout the book of Acts, the disciples lived under grace.

#### **Multiple Choice**

5. Chapters one through seven of the book of Acts is:
  - a)an account of the beginning of the Church, the Body of Christ.
  - b)a continuation of "time past."
  - c)the beginning of the dispensation of grace.
  - d)a description of Christ's ministry on earth.
6. The book of Acts tells about:
  - a)Israel's acceptance of God's kingdom.
  - b)Israel's repentance and conversion.
  - c)Israel's humility and love for God's Word.
  - d)Israel's rejection of God's kingdom.
7. In the Old Testament:
  - a)God the Father spoke to Israel through the prophets.
  - b)God the Son spoke to Israel through Christ's earthly ministry.
  - c)God the Holy Spirit spoke to Israel through the Spirit-filled disciples.
  - d)The prophets announced that the kingdom was at hand.

**Fill in the Blanks**

8. Many churches, seminaries, and Bible colleges mistakenly teach that the Church, the Body of Christ began in \_\_\_\_\_.

9. In Acts 2, Peter said that Christ was raised from the dead to sit on the throne of \_\_\_\_\_.

10. The gospel of \_\_\_\_\_ *cannot* be found in Acts 1-7.

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