

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 and fear*.

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. God 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).

Kingdom Offered

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 as a ransom for the nation. 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 (verse 34). 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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