

## **Introduction Part 2**

The book of Acts is a transitional book, meaning it stands between two different ways that God is dealing with mankind. It is specifically bridging between God's deal with Israel under prophecy, and His dealing with mankind in terms of the Mystery and the formation of the Church, the Body of Christ. It can also be said that Acts separates God's dealing with man under the Mosaic Law and His dealing with us under Grace.

Being a transitional book means that it is impossible to use this book to define doctrinal beliefs. The problem is in knowing what part belongs to the old dispensation and which part belongs to the new. There are aspects of both dispensations in play, especially in the middle portion of Acts. However, the first portion of Acts shows us what was happening during the advancement of the Kingdom program, as prophesied in the Old Testament, while the very end of Acts shows the early events of the preaching of the Mystery by the Apostle Paul. The events in the middle are a mixture of both dispensations because as one is on the downswing (Kingdom), the other is on the upswing (Body). We can see this trend by observing the relative importance placed on Peter and Paul. We see all Peter in early Acts, and all Paul in late Acts, while both are active in the middle.

### **Pivotal moments**

When reading through the book of Acts, it appears that there are three pivotal moments presented. The first pivotal event is the giving of the Holy Spirit in Acts 2. This incident was a matter of prophecy, which was also promised by John the Baptist (Ezekiel 11:19; 36:27; 37:14; 39:29; Isaiah 32:15; Zechariah 12:10; Matthew 3:11; Luke 3:16; John 1:33). This was proof of God continuing His relationship with Israel and was an advancement of the Kingdom program promised to Israel. The giving of the Holy Spirit led to the actual offer of the Kingdom to Israel in Acts 3:19.

The second pivotal event is found in Acts 7 when the leadership of Israel rejected the testimony of the Holy Spirit as given through Stephen. This change was marked by showing Jesus Christ no longer sitting at the right hand of the Father. He was now standing, ready to pour out His wrath on the world (Psalm 7:6; 110:1; Isaiah 2:19—21; 3:13). Israel rejected the offer to their invitation to accept Jesus Christ as Messiah and come into the Kingdom.

Finally we see a change in how God was dealing with Israel and the nations. Instead of going through Israel exclusively, He raised up Paul to bring salvation to the Gentiles without involving the nation of Israel (Acts 9:15; 13:46; 1 Timothy 1:12—16). Although Jesus Christ was seen standing in Acts 7, He is once more seated at the right hand of the Father (Ephesians 1:20). His wrath was not poured out on the world at that time so therefore, that will happen in the future to fulfill prophecy. Israel has now been temporarily set aside.

### **Israel's fall and diminishing**

Most fundamental theologians see Acts as a book that records the establishment and rise of the Christian church. Most see it as a history book, chronicling the rise and spread of Christianity. Some even consider Acts to be a pattern that we should use for church growth today. Most fail to see a connection with Romans 9—11 because if they had, they would understand the book of Acts in an entirely new way. In these three chapters, Paul turns to the nation of Israel to speak directly to them.

### **Israel's past**

Chapter 9 of Romans gives some historical perspective of Israel. Paul first speaks of his great sorrow that Israel has rejected their Messiah. From his own perspective, he, as the rest of Israel's leadership, had wished to be accursed and separated from this troublemaker, Jesus Christ. He viewed this as being a good thing for his brothers (the Jews). (Note: This verse is usually misinterpreted to mean that Paul wished he could be sent to hell in place of his Jewish brothers, in order to save them. However, Paul is

speaking past-tense, before his conversion. This is evident from the verb *could wish* which depicts continuous action in past time. He is saying: “I was wishing...”)

Paul continues, in much of the rest of the chapter, to show how Israel had rejected God time after time. They were trying to gain righteousness by obeying the Law instead of through faith in God.

### **Israel's present**

In Romans 10, Paul continues to address Israel, telling them of his strong desire to see them reach out to Jesus Christ for their salvation. He is not speaking to them in terms of the Gospel of the Kingdom, as some would interpret. A careful reading indicates he desires that they come to the One who is the end of the Law (verse 4). Israel will always be under the Mosaic Law, or some form of it. Even in the Kingdom, they will be under the Law, but will finally be able to fulfill the Law through the power of the Spirit (Jeremiah 31:33—34), when Christ gives them the Holy Spirit (see verses above). We in the Church, the Body of Christ, have already fulfilled the Law because we are in Christ and Christ fully kept the Law (Romans 8:1—4). In contrast to believers, the world is still being condemned by the Law in this Dispensation of Grace (1 Timothy 1:8). Those who think the Mystery was taught only after Acts 28 should find this problematic. Much of the defense of their doctrine is that if it sounds Jewish, then it must have happened under the Dispensation of Law. This verse, written to Timothy, was very late in Paul's life, and indicates that the Law still condemns the world. If those in the Acts 28 camp were consistent, they would say God was still dealing with Israel at this time because the Law was still in effect.

Paul is addressing Israel from the standpoint of the current (present) time. Israel had been set aside and God had given Paul the commission to bring the Mystery to the Gentiles (Acts 9, 18, 26; Romans 16:25—27; Colossians 1:25—27). He condemns Israel by making it clear that they knew exactly what they were doing when they rejected their Messiah.

### **Israel's future**

Finally, Paul finishes speaking to Israel in Romans 11 by assuring them that they do have a future. They fell and were diminishing (11:11—12), but they were not cast away for good. Paul makes plain that Jews can be saved in this Dispensation of Grace, just as Paul was saved (verse 5), and it was his desire that having the Gospel of Grace (Acts 20:24) going to the Gentiles would prompt some of his Jewish brothers to get saved (verse 14). Eventually, all Israel will be saved (verse 26), but that will not happen until unbelieving Israel is purged, leaving only true Israel to go into the Millennial Kingdom (Zechariah 13:9; Malachi 3:2). This is the time Paul is looking forward to in this chapter of Romans.

### **An outline of Acts**

Out of this summary of Israel's past, present and future, we can find an outline of the book of Acts.

**Romans 11:11—12**<sup>11</sup> I say then, Have they stumbled that they should fall? God forbid: but rather through their fall salvation is come unto the Gentiles, for to provoke them to jealousy.<sup>12</sup> Now if the fall of them be the riches of the world, and the diminishing of them the riches of the Gentiles; how much more their fulness?

Three key words stand out in this passage. Israel stumbled over the Stone of stumbling as Jesus manifested Himself to them for over three-years while on earth. Time after time they rejected His claim to be their Messiah (Isaiah 8:14; 1 Peter 2:8). They fell when they rejected the offer of the Kingdom and stoned Stephen to death (Acts 7). They diminished throughout the book of Acts, until God treated them as He does any other nation. This will continue until after the Rapture of the church.

The book of Acts is not about the rise of the church, but chronicles Israel's fall and diminishing.

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