

MORE SEED & BREAD, ISSUE NO. 325

RESTORING THE KINGDOM TO ISRAEL?

By Andrew Brown

This promise of God was imprinted on their hearts. They dreamt of its fulfillment. In constant slavery to governments, even their own, Israel knew they were supposed to be **the head and not the tail** (Deut. 28:13 *NASB* throughout)

but the heavy hand of Rome was upon them. Godly Israelites still continued to cling to the hope of the coming Kingdom. Many were like Joseph of Arimathea who was waiting for the kingdom of God (Luke 23:51). Their expectation **was that a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us; and the government will rest on His shoulders** (Isa. 9:6). That child came when Jesus was born and walked among men; even His name meant "Jehovah, the Savior." At first, His death must have felt utterly crushing, but the Lord was resurrected and continued to proclaim the Kingdom afterward (Acts 1:3). His disciples desired the reassuring words from the risen Lord that it was time for His reign, but He did not answer, It is not for you to know times (Acts 1:7).

Luke introduced Acts by explaining the gospel he had already written was about all that Jesus began to do and teach, until the day when He was taken up *to heaven* (Acts 1:1,2). Luke's gospel is a record of Jesus' life, death and resurrection. Luke's second account begins with the question, **is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?** (Acts 1:6). The Kingdom had been Jesus' main teaching. What happened to God's government being at hand, its inauguration in their lifetime, and the takeover of the world? The question of the Kingdom of God is *the theme that hovers over the entire Bible*.

The answer to the beginning question of the book of Acts is that the "Kingdom" or "Government of God" *did begin* its takeover after Jesus' return to Heaven. Jesus had compared the Kingdom's arrival to the stages of growing grain (Mk. 4). Understanding "the blade" stage of the Kingdom was completed during Acts brings clarity to otherwise confusing Scriptures. For example, in Luke 9:27 the disciples were told the Kingdom would come before they tasted death. This prophecy was fulfilled during Acts. During the gospels, Jesus had given "samples" of what His government would offer: sustenance, health, resurrection, miracles. Unlike the promise's politicians running for office today make, *His promises were experienced displaying His justice, power, and authority*. At this onset, powers were appropriately distributed to the governmental "officials."

Exploring the commission Jesus gave to the 11 disciples in Mark 16 gives further understanding of what happened at this time. After His resurrection Jesus directed the disciples, **Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation** (Mark 16:15). Those listening understood, **and they went out and preached everywhere, while the Lord worked with them, and confirmed the word by the signs that followed** (Mark 16:20). During Acts they did what Jesus had told them to. Mark's account is past tense, which is significant, demonstrating this commission was COMPLETED before Mark wrote His gospel.

Misunderstanding arises as to the "creation" they were to preach the gospel to. What creation? Scripture notes the commission was completed, but the apostles did not travel around the globe. Consider when God called Abraham He created a new nation. Israel is His "creation." These apostles were to herald the message of Christ to all Israelites living at this time. This is what they did in Acts.

Estimates say around eight million Jews, including those dispersed among the nations. These governmental heralds were given abilities to perform this enormous task. These signs will accompany those who have believed (Mark 16:17). No power could stop them for they even cast out demons. Many Jews lived among the nations speaking different languages, but no language (tongue) barrier could stop them. No beast could harm them for they will pick up serpents. No assassin would thwart the mission for **if they drink any deadly poison, it will not hurt them**. No difficulty would be too big **for they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover** (Mark 16:17-18) God saw to it they were successful as Mark 16:20 revealed. **But I say, surely they have never heard, have they? Indeed they have; Their voice has gone out into all the earth, and their words to the ends of the world** (Rom. 10:18).

The second chapter of Acts finds these men celebrating the Israelite holiday of Pentecost when they collected on the Lord's promise to receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you (Acts 1:8). Tongues of "fire" are a visual representation of their judgmental power. All governments have judges (Matt. 19:28). They had delegated power and authority to carry out Christ's commission to preach the gospel to "the creation."

What was playing out at this time? The message of Christ as the Messiah was delivered to all Israelites over about 33 years and the Kingdom of God was simultaneously growing in the manner the Lord had foretold. The number started with a little trickle of 120 and instantly produced 5,000 men. The gospel continued throughout Israel and soon spread to Hellenist Jews with a different language. The gospel spread to the Samaritans (half- Jews). At first this government experienced a Great Unity which, after training, were scattered among the nations to perform a specific task **of speaking the word to no one except to Jews alone. But there were some ... speaking to the Greeks also** (Acts 11:19, 20). These Greeks were Israelites who had given up their ancestral Israelite culture and taken up the "Greek" lifestyle. Like the parable of the mustard seed growing and expanding, the Kingdom was spreading explosively.

Consider how, even in the initial stage, God's government was handling any threat. It solved the sins of those within its government (Acts 5). It solved the distribution of food to the needy believers (Acts 6). It converted the largest enemy Saul (Acts 9) and killed an opposing enemy King Herod (Acts 12). Nuances and disputes in the law were easily addressed (Acts 15).

When Paul enters the scene, Acts turns its attention to the change and expansion of the Kingdom his ministry brought. God designated Paul and Barnabas specifically for the special service of traveling to the nations (Acts 13). **James and Cephas and John, who were reputed to be pillars, gave to me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, so that we *might go to the Gentiles [nations] and they to the circumcised*** (Gal. 2:9, 10). They were sent away from the land of Israel, away from the law-keeping, circumcised Jews. Given to a different audience of Israelites, Paul's message came from a different angle. These Israelites were scattered throughout the Roman Empire. Paul encountered more diverse dialects, as well as more Israelites who had abandoned God's law and lived as Greeks. His custom was to head to cities with a synagogue and herald a perfectly-tailored message from God to Israelites, inviting them to align with the exciting happenings. If there were countries without Israelites Paul would not venture there, for he was fulfilling the commission of Mark 16.

When Paul started heralding to non-Israelites it fit, having been fore- seen throughout the Old Testament that the nations would receive salvation through Israel. Paul was able to quote verses from the Old Testament in Romans 15 proving this. Paul explained that his actions in heralding the message to Gentiles were to provoke Israelites to jealousy so they would believe (Rom. 11:11). The secret in this was that there were non-Jews grafted into Israel's blessings. Acts is NOT the beginning stages of the Dispensation of Grace. The Kingdom was moving according

to God's set plan.

Peter had prepared the way for Paul's branch of the ministry by heralding the gospel to the Gentile Cornelius (Acts 10). Peter knew going to non-Jews was not the commission he previously received, which explains why he needed three distinct visions to gain certainty. When the Jews heard Peter's explanation, their arguments were silenced and they glorified God, saying, 'Well then, God has granted to the Gentiles [nations] also the repentance *that leads to life*' (Acts 11:18). This was just another advancement of God's government.

Throughout Acts the Kingdom was increasing as God's heralds brought the message to the entire population of Israelites, as well as extending an invitation for some non-Israelites. Yet at the end of Acts, the question of the Kingdom still hovered over the situation. Would the Kingdom be restored? Would it continue to advance? Mark 16's commission would come to a close when the entirety of "the creation" was reached. At that point, Paul reached Rome, which was the capital of the dispersed Jews. There Paul scheduled a meeting with the last Israelites NOT to hear. As Paul noted, but now, with no further place for me in these regions (Rom. 15:23), there were no other places for Paul to herald since Jews everywhere had heard. Paul brought them the gospel of Jesus and the Kingdom (Acts 28:23). At this point with the Mark 16 commission completed and the Kingdom underway, God threw a massive surprise into the events of human history by revealing an additional secret of His plan. This new revelation was not brought about due to the rejection of the message, for myriads of Israelites believed it. This change was to establish a record of the riches of His grace and to accomplish a different purpose apart from His Kingdom plan.

The book of Acts closes with the salvation-bringing message of God being sent to the nations and the guarantee that they would hear it (Acts 28:28). This change was dramatic. Unlike Acts 13:46 and Acts 18:6 where heralds had turned to the Gentiles to bring other Jews to jealousy, this time *the message itself* was sent to the nations. The nations were receiving this enormous blessing apart from a herald and APART from Israel. This was completely different from what was happening during Acts. The nations were blessed through Israel (Gen.12:3) according to the promise given to Abraham. The sending of the message to the nations was a new revelation.

Acts ends after this statement leaving the reader to contemplations. Was this not abrupt? Paul was journeying to Rome for a trial before Caesar for almost a fourth of the book of Acts; why was no Caesar meeting recorded? Because Acts' theme is the Kingdom's restoration to Israel and at Acts 28:28, the answer changed to emphatically NOT YET. The Kingdom's take-over had been making huge strides but *was suspended!* Its advancement faded into an unknown future time. Much work was required to establish understanding of the change. The gospels, the record of Acts, and other epistles explaining the new work of God needed to be written.

Acts answers many questions raised by the gospels and also bridges the gap into the day in which we now live. All major elements of government were present during Acts. It provided the framework for thriving subjects, as God was working actively to establish an orderly rule.

God's government work will be resumed at the proper time, and then the Kingdom will be restored to Israel. We long for that day.

The SEED & BREAD Bible-Study leaflets are published as often as time and means permit and are sent free to all names on THE WORD OF TRUTH MINISTRY mailing list. Send us your name. There will be no obligation, solicitation or visitation.

ISSUE NO.

September 2018
