

the gates of hell (death) shall not prevail against it. 19. And I will give unto thee the keys (authority) of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.

Here we have it. The positions of authority in the Kingdom of God, taken away from the wicked leaders, will be given to the Twelve Apostles with Peter in the lead, governing those Jews in Acts who believe that Jesus is their Messiah, forming a nation which brings forth the fruits God expects. This is the nation of Matthew 21:43.

BLASPHEMING THE HOLY SPIRIT

A final look at Scripture has us recall Strike Three earlier, which claims that Israel blasphemed the Holy Spirit when she stoned Stephen, who was full of the Holy Ghost (Acts 7:55). In Mark 3:28-30 we locate the Bible's own definition for blaspheming the Holy Ghost (Spirit). Here the scribes accuse Jesus of performing miracles under the power of Beelzebub, the prince of devils, not by the power of the Holy Spirit. We find our definition for blaspheming the Holy Ghost in verse 30. Paraphrasing, it's when you give the devil credit and glory for a miracle performed under the power of the Holy Spirit. It has nothing to do with killing Stephen or anybody else.

It should be clear that Israel does not fall in Acts 7. She merely strays from God's expectations for her ("fall," *Gk-paraptōma*, to lapse or deviate from truth or righteousness). Rather, the wicked leaders of Israel, the chief priests and Pharisees, are the ones who get cast out and replaced with the Twelve Apostles who, together with the Jews believing that Jesus was their Messiah, form a new fruitful nation in Acts.

This leaves us with one conclusion: Since Israel did not fall mid-Acts, neither did God's Kingdom administration for her. Accordingly, God's Dispensation of Grace did not appear Mid-Acts to replace the Kingdom one, but arrived at Acts 28:28, just like the Acts 28 camp asserts.

I've got the baseball game on television. Our pitcher just struck out a Detroit batter. "One, two, three strikes, you're out!"


Based on Scriptures contradicting a Mid-Acts fall for Israel I have to conclude, when it comes to rules, "Three strikes, you're out" needs to stay on the baseball diamond and out of the Bible.

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THREE STRIKES AND MID-ACTS IS OUT

By Candace Davis

God has different methods for administering mankind. One, the Acts Period for Israel, consists of God intervening with rewards and punishments based on obedience to His commands laid out in the Law of Moses. Another, the Dispensation of Grace for today, focuses on all nations equally and consists of God intervening only when He can administer pure grace, favor and mercy to those who don't deserve it. Under this administration, mankind is left to govern itself.

Further, there exist several camps of teaching. One camp (Acts 28) teaches that the Acts Period was in operation throughout Acts until it was suspended squarely at Acts 28:28 (Be it known therefore unto you, that the salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles, and that they will hear it). It's here that God changed His programs of operation from Kingdom to Grace.

The other camp (Mid-Acts) teaches that God's Acts Period was running fully only until Acts 7 when Israel fell at the stoning of Stephen. Thereafter the Acts Period steadily diminished until it disappeared from the scene by the end of Acts.

Here is where the overlapping of God's administrations comes in. Mid-Acts derives its name from their doctrine that God's administration of Grace began in Mid-Acts when God saved Paul on the road to Damascus. From then on the Dispensation of Grace gained steam while the Acts Period faded away; both administrations operated simultaneously, according to Mid-Acts. They criss-crossed.

Does this even matter? It does if we want to understand the will of God and the administration of God specifically for us. Ephesians 5:17: Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is.

One variance between the two camps of teaching hinges on whether Israel falls in Acts 7, making way for God's new Dispensation of Grace. So

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ISSUE NO.

317

Published
April 2017

let's study it out. Mid-Acts uses a "baseball idiom" to survey Israel's Acts 7 fall:

Strike One: Israel's first strike was when she spurned the prophets sent to her, finally killing John the Baptist—rejecting God the Father.

Strike Two: Israel's second strike was at the crucifixion of Christ—rejecting God the Son.

Strike Three: Israel's third and final strike was in Acts 7 when she stoned Stephen—blaspheming and rejecting God the Holy Spirit.

Mid-Acts also cites Scripture to verify Israel's fall. Let's examine these passages for ourselves, comparing Scripture with Scripture.

FALL / DIMINISHING

Romans 11:11-12 talks of a stumbling, a fall, and a diminishing. Here's the passage with Mid-Acts interpretation in parentheses:

11. I say then, Have they stumbled (tripped at the cross) that they should fall (get set aside by God)? God forbid: but rather through their fall (later, getting set aside by God at the stoning of Stephen) salvation is come unto the Gentiles, for to provoke them to jealousy. 12. Now if the fall (their getting set aside by God at the stoning of Stephen) of them be the riches of the world, and the diminishing (after the fall, the gradual fading away of Israel and her Kingdom Program) of them the riches of the Gentiles; how much more their fulness? Now let's look at the same passage, this time interpreted using the original Greek definitions, in parentheses:

11. I say then, Have they stumbled that they should fall? (Gk.-*piptō*, to fall prostrate, completely; to fail) God forbid: but rather through their fall (Gk.-*paraptōma*, to lapse or deviate from truth or righteousness) salvation is come unto the Gentiles, for to provoke them to jealousy.

Here's a detail that's easy to miss. The word "fall" appears twice in this passage, but each one is translated from a different Greek word, with a different definition:

12. Now if the fall (Gk.-*paraptōma*, to lapse or deviate from truth or righteousness) of them be the riches of the world, and the diminishing (Gk.-*hēttēma*, defeat, failure, fault) of them the riches of the Gentiles; how much more their fulness?

Based on the Greek, Israel did not gradually fade away; she lapsed from God's truth and failed to meet God's expectations, yes, but she remained His people throughout Acts.

VINEYARD

A parable in Luke 13:6-9 is the main proof-text for Israel's Mid-Acts fall. The typical interpretations are in parentheses.

6. He spake also this parable; A certain man (God) had a fig tree (Israel) planted in his vineyard; and he came and sought fruit thereon, and found none. 7. Then said he unto the dresser of his vineyard, Behold, these three years (the earthly ministry of Christ) I come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and find none: cut it down; why cumbereth

it the ground? 8. And he answering said unto him, Lord, let it alone this year also, till I shall dig about it, and dung it: 9. And if it bears fruit, well: and if not, then after that thou shalt cut it down (Israel is given a one-year extension to be fruitful, into the early book of Acts).

Before we give this interpretation "the green light," let's compare Scripture with Scripture. Notice, the setting for this parable is a vineyard. A word search reveals two passages using a vineyard to symbolize the nation Israel: Psalm 80, and Isaiah 5. With this, let's return to our parable and make a substitution; let's say that Israel is symbolized by the vineyard, not by the fig tree. Now we're left to determine the identity of the fruitless fig tree.

FIG TREE

Our answer is found in another parable in Matthew 21:43-45. Again we find a vineyard, most likely symbolizing Israel. Here, a landowner (God) hires farmers to work his vineyard. At harvest time, the landowner sends his agents (prophets) to collect the fruits from the farmers, but they beat one, kill one, and stone another. Next the landowner sends a larger group with the same results. Finally he sends his son (Christ) to collect the fruits, but the farmers kill him too. The next verses pinpoint the identity of the farmers.

43. Therefore say I unto you, the kingdom (government, rule) of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof. 44. And whosoever shall fall on this stone shall be broken: but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder. 45. And when the chief priests and Pharisees had heard his parables, they perceived that he spake of them.

There it is. The chief priests and Pharisees, Israel's leaders, will have their authority removed. In answer to the identity of the fig tree in Luke 13, it is these chief priests and Pharisees who are symbolized by the fig tree. It's these wicked leaders who are given one last chance to govern Israel (vineyard) as God expects. Otherwise, they will be cut down, as the Luke parable says.

NATION

Next we look to identify the nation bringing forth godly fruits (Matt. 21:43), the nation to whom God will give the government rule taken away from the chief priests and Pharisees.

In Matthew 16:16-19 Jesus is warning His disciples about the wrong doctrine of the Pharisees and Sadducees, who had just demanded that Jesus prove himself by showing them a sign from heaven. Jesus has performed plenty of miracles already and isn't about to bow to these wicked leaders. Peter, on the other hand, requires no additional proof, saying, **16. . . Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. 17. And Jesus answered and said unto him . . . Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church (out-called assembly); and**