

Acts 7:54—60

- At the end of Acts 7 we see the beginning of a big change in how God deals with Israel.
- In the Gospels, Jesus has been preparing Israel for the coming Millennial Kingdom.
 - John the Baptizer came with the message: “Repent for the Kingdom of heaven is at hand.” (Matthew 3:2)
 - Jesus came with the message: “Repent, for the Kingdom of heaven is at hand.”(Matthew 4:17)
 - Jesus taught the Disciples to pray for the Kingdom to come. (Matthew 6:10)
 - Jesus told the Disciples to go out to the cities and preach, “The Kingdom of heaven is at hand.” (Matthew 10:7)
 - The Kingdom of God was not yet there but was close to coming.
 - Luke 10:9**...say to them, ' The kingdom of God has come near to you.'
 - Jesus told the Pharisees that the Kingdom of God was in their midst. (Luke 17:21)
 - Jesus had talked so much about the Kingdom that they thought it would appear immediately—a literal, tangible city with Christ as King. (Luke 19:11). This is where He tells a parable about the Kingdom being delayed until after Jesus went to heaven to receive the Kingdom from the Father.
 - Even the thief on the cross understood a literal Kingdom was to come. He stated his belief in Jesus as the Messiah.
 - Luke 23:42** And he was saying, "Jesus, remember me when You come in Your kingdom!"
 - Joseph of Arimathea believed in a literal Kingdom.
 - Luke 23:51** [Joseph] a man from Arimathea, a city of the Jews, who was waiting for the kingdom of God;
- National Israel sent three messages of rejection, each one directed to a different person of the Godhead.
 - God sent John the Baptizer as a testimony to Israel—they stood by as he was killed.
 - Jesus Christ came proclaiming the coming Kingdom—they demanded that He be put to death.
 - Stephen came in the power of the Holy Spirit—they murdered him.
 - Notice how with each rejection they became more involved in the process of rejection.
- It was with the last rejection that God rejects Israel as His chosen people and closes the door on the opportunity for them to repent and go back and accept Jesus as Messiah to bring in the Millennial Kingdom.
- This, I believe, was the cutting off of Israel referred to in Romans.
 - Romans 11:17—21** ¹⁷But if some of the branches were broken off, and you, being a wild olive, were grafted in among them and became partaker with them of the rich root of the olive tree, ¹⁸do not be arrogant toward the branches; but if you are arrogant, remember that it is not you who supports the root, but the root supports you. ¹⁹You will say then, "Branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in." ²⁰Quite right, they were broken off for their unbelief, but you stand by your faith Do not be conceited, but fear; ²¹for if God did not spare the natural branches, He will not spare you, either.
 - Israel had tripped but was not going to be done away with permanently.
- Israel’s cutting off had immediate invisible effects in heaven but it took another 30 years for these changes to be completely revealed on earth.
- God will often work in man’s time when He makes changes.
 - Exodus 23:30** I will drive them out before you little by little, until you become fruitful and take possession of the land.
 - Noah spent 120 years building the ark giving those around him to repent of their wickedness.
 - Moses spent 40 years in training before leading the Israelites out of Egypt.

- God did not immediately send out a memo to institute changes after Israel was cut off. This is why there is confusion if you try to formulate your doctrine from Acts. It's difficult to differentiate what is for the Kingdom and what is for the Age of Grace.
- It was at this point that God changed plans (actually a plan he had before the foundation of the world) and would deal with the Gentiles directly instead of going through Israel.
- As we continue on, we will hopefully see how one program was cycling down while another program was gearing up. This is the transition.

Acts 8:1—3

- As Saul looks on while Stephen is being stoned, he is nodding his approval and probably thinking about what he can do to obliterate the Jesus believers.
- This stoning emboldened the persecution of believers.
- So far everything takes place in Jerusalem. The “Great Commission” states that they needed to go from Jerusalem, all of Judea, to Samaria and to the uttermost parts of the world. Many believe God sent this persecution to cause the believers to disperse and thus carry the Gospel of the Kingdom where God wanted it to be carried.
 - The Apostle's ministry was to begin in Jerusalem and then radiate out from there. **Luke 24:47** and that repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem.
 - With the persecution came the scattering of believers to areas outside of Jerusalem. Many call this a fulfillment of the “Great Commission”.
 - However, the Apostles to whom Jesus directly gave the commission to did not leave Jerusalem. How could this be a fulfillment of the command when it has not been accomplished?
- Those who scattered from Jerusalem left because of intense persecution. The Apostles, to their credit, stayed in Jerusalem because their job was not yet done.
 - Jerusalem needed to believe before the message was to spread beyond Jerusalem.
 - Once they believed, Christ would be able to come back and take His rightful throne.
 - However, since His rejection, at the Second Coming He will cause them to all believe and then take His rightful throne.
- Evidence of Israel's rejection of Christ is found in the persecution and scattering of believers and the Apostles continuing to stay in Jerusalem. If their job would have been completed in Jerusalem, they would be free to move on.

Acts 8:4—13

Philip in Samaria

- Those who were scattered went preaching the word. This was the Gospel of the Kingdom.
 - They preached at first only to Jews and later to Gentiles. **Acts 11:19—20** ¹⁹So then those who were scattered because of the persecution that occurred in connection with Stephen made their way to Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch, speaking the word to no one except to Jews alone. ²⁰But there were some of them, men of Cyprus and Cyrene, who came to Antioch and began speaking to the Greeks also, preaching the Lord Jesus.
- Philip went to Samaria and proclaimed Christ—that Jesus was the Messiah (verse 5) and the good news of the Kingdom of God (verse 12).
 - Samaria is about 40 miles north of Jerusalem and was the capital of the 10 northern tribes.
 - Samaritans were Jews but were considered worst than dogs by the Jews (of the 2 southern tribes) because they committed a grievous sin by not worshiping in Jerusalem.
 - Ezekiel 37 prophesizes that the two tribes will be brought back together.

- The Holy Spirit was active and there were many miracles, sign and wonders performed by Philip.
 - Remember, sign gifts were for Israel's benefit. If you see a sign gift, you will see an Israelite nearby.
- It's interesting to note that they were not called to repentance but were said to believe. At that point they were baptized
- Special note about Simon the Sorcerer.
 - Verse 13 says he believed and was baptized but later Peter declared his heart was not right and he needed to repent.
 - It seems he believed Jesus was the Messiah but he hadn't put his full trust in that fact.
 - He had a head knowledge but his heart was not changed.
 - It's also possible that he truly believed but he did not endure to the end.
 - Matthew 10:22** You will be hated by all because of My name, but it is the one who has endured to the end who will be saved.
 - John 8:31** So Jesus was saying to those Jews who had believed Him, "If you continue in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine;
 - Perhaps this is an example of the word falling on rocky soil. (Matthew 13; Mark 4; Luke 8)

Acts 8:14—24

- Many believed and were baptized but they did not receive the gift of the holy Spirit.(verse 16)
 - However, it was the Holy Spirit that was instrumental in causing them to believe. The Holy Spirit was active but not visibly at this point.
 - The visible manifestation of the Holy Spirit occurred when Peter and John came from Jerusalem to give them the gift of the Holy Spirit. This refers to the visible manifestation of the Holy Spirit when He fell on them on the day of Pentecost (see verse 16).
- God gave the Samaritans legitimacy in the eyes of the Jews by having Peter and John come and bestow the gift of the holy Spirit on them. This also showed the Samaritans that the seat of power for Israel was in Jerusalem.
- This was the beginning of healing a 1000 year split in Israel.

Acts 8:25—40

The Ethiopian

- As they were leaving Samaria to go back to Jerusalem, Philip was told to go south to Gaza.
 - Gaza is about 60 miles south east of Jerusalem.
- I believe the Ethiopian eunuch was a Jew.
 - Ethiopia has a long history with Israel starting with the Queen of Sheba and King Solomon.
 - Even now there are Jewish customs and traditions practiced by those in parts of Ethiopia.
 - There are even those who think the Ark of the Covenant is located in Ethiopia.
- It seems that God is spreading the Gospel message beyond Jerusalem but restricted to Jews only.
- Philip preached Jesus to the Ethiopian (verse 35). This was the earthly Jesus with the Kingdom message taught by Jesus to all the Disciples.
- He was baptized because that was a part of the Kingdom message going back to John the Baptizer.
- Baptists often use verse 38 as one of their proof texts that baptism needs to be by immersion.
 - If this is the case, then both the baptizer and baptizee needed to dunk themselves under the water.
 - Instead, it makes perfect sense that they walked down to the pool or stream of water and he was then sprinkled or poured upon which is the manner the Jews performed baptism .
- Philip suddenly found himself about 20 miles north of Gaza and he walked along the Mediterranean Sea to Caesarea, another 50 miles north.
- All along the way he preached the Kingdom Gospel.

Significance of post-Kingdom events

- Even though the entrance to the Kingdom by national Israel had been closed for now, Philip was still preaching the good news of the Kingdom.
 - What had happened in heaven had not yet been made known to man.
 - This closing of the Kingdom doors to national Israel was announced through the same person who will announce the formation of the Body of Christ (Paul).
 - Israel rejected God's offer of the Kingdom three times and Paul pronounces God's rejection of Israel three times.
 - Acts 13:46** Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly and said, "It was necessary that the word of God be spoken to you first; since you repudiate it and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we are turning to the Gentiles. (Pisidian Antioch).
 - Acts 18:6** But when they resisted and blasphemed, he shook out his garments and said to them, "Your blood be on your own heads! I am clean From now on I will go to the Gentiles." (Corinth)
 - Acts 28:28** "Therefore let it be known to you that this salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles; they will also listen." (Rome)
- This spreading of the Gospel to those outside of Israel was not in fulfillment of the Great Commission but in spite of it. Even though Jerusalem rejected Christ, the Gospel still needed to go to all Israel—Samaritans and those beyond Jerusalem and Samaria.
 - There was no chance for the Kingdom to come to earth at this time but individuals still needed to make a decision to follow or reject Jesus.

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