

Back to Peter

Acts 9:32—10:8

Luke has been focusing on the lives and events of the Apostles as they minister to Israel in the first seven chapters of Acts. Once Israel rejected the offer of the Kingdom, given by the Holy Spirit through Stephen, God temporarily pulled the offer off the table, and suspended the preaching of the Kingdom being at hand (Matthew 3:2; 4:7; 10:7). The last offer of the Kingdom to Israel is found in Peter's sermon in Acts 3:19—21. This times of refreshing and time of restitution is tied in with the coming of Jesus Christ to take His rightful position as King. This event was no longer in view since it was now pushed off into the distant future.

However, even though Israel lost the opportunity to shortly enter into the Millennial Kingdom, they still needed to believe in Christ as Messiah. The Gospel of the Kingdom was still being preached, and was actually being spread farther and wider as Saul, the Pharisee, was chasing down believers to imprison and kill them to stamp out the name of Jesus. They still had the hope of a future in the Millennial Kingdom, even though it would not be set up until thousands of years later.

This is something that Peter had to deal with as he ministered to Kingdom believers who were wondering why the Kingdom had not happened. He assured them that even though the Kingdom was not being set up right away, that it would happen sometime in the future. The Lord is not slack concerning His promise (2 Peter 3:8—10). Everything will happen exactly as the Lord had planned and at the time that He planned it, even though it was not according to their timing.

Many today have jumped on the covenant bandwagon because God is not working according to how they think He should be working. Instead of taking Scripture literally and interpreting it through dispensational eyes, they think that God's promise of a Kingdom should have been already fulfilled and therefore they often interpret the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 as being the tribulation, or that He was merely speaking of tribulation in our lives. They also often interpret the Kingdom to be a kingdom of believers with Christ ruling on the throne of our hearts, and that the Rapture is the Second Coming with the Promised Land being heaven. So much confusion is created so that they can fit the Bible into their theology. God will bring future events to a close in His own timing even when man, once again, misinterprets God's word.

Peter's message

While Paul is out preaching in Syria and Cilicia (Galatians 1:21), Peter is still busy preaching (the Gospel of the Kingdom) and performing miracles. Paul's work in Syria and Cilicia resulted in a number of new churches, many of these churches were visited when he and Barnabas went on their first journey as recorded in Acts 13. God was still dealing with Israel and making sure that they had an opportunity to believe, in spite of the religious leaders opposing anything to do with Christ. There is no indication that Peter was preaching the Gospel of Grace at this time, even though he and Paul had met briefly in Jerusalem. It is, however, often thought (especially mid-Acts teachers) that Cornelius became a Kingdom believer because he heard the Gospel of the Kingdom from Peter. They compare Acts 10:35 (but in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him) with Titus 3:5 (not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost) to show Cornelius could not be in the Body of Christ.

If this were true, then there were two gospels being preached simultaneously, and whichever Gospel was responded to would be the one they were saved under. If saved by the Gospel of the Kingdom, they

would have an earthly Kingdom hope. If saved under the Gospel of Grace, then they would have a heavenly hope. The one major flaw in that thinking is that Paul makes it clear that he set the pattern of those who would follow him (1 Timothy 1:16). Paul's salvation draws a line of demarcation between the Kingdom and Grace. Everyone following Paul in salvation would be saved into the Body of Christ. Their salvation is based on faith in Christ even if they didn't understand completely the Gospel preached by Paul. Just as I was saved at the age of five and lacked much knowledge about that salvation, I know when I trusted Jesus Christ for my salvation. Cornelius also trusted Jesus completely for his salvation. I'm sure he learned much more about his faith in Jesus Christ in future years. I believe anyone saved after Paul was automatically put into the Body of Christ, even if they didn't fully understand this new revelation at the time they believed.

Peter's first miracle healed Aeneas who was paralyzed and confined to bed for the past eight years. It appears that he is a picture of Israel since the stoning of Stephen. Eight years have elapsed and Israel has been in a state of paralysis, unable to move. Only Jesus Christ was able to heal Aeneas, and only He is able to heal Israel. Although God is not dealing with Israel as a nation at this point, Israelites still needed to trust in Jesus Christ.

Continuing the miracles, Peter moves on to Joppa on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea northwest of Jerusalem. It's there that Tabitha died and the disciples from that city called out to Peter to come to them. He brought her back to life and many believed at that time.

Tabitha also seems to be a picture given to the Little Flock of believers to give them hope of a future resurrection. We know this will happen as shown by the dead, dry bones being given life and brought into the Kingdom (Ezekiel 37:1—4) at the Second Coming. Peter is still ministering to Israel even though Paul has been preaching the Gospel of Grace. When Peter wrote his two epistles, they were directed to Israel as an encouragement of God's future plans for them. Peter never preached the grace message, but rather stayed with the Gospel of the Kingdom and continued to minister to Kingdom believers. This arrangement is made official in Acts 15 at the Council at Jerusalem between Peter and Paul as Peter agrees to continue ministering to the circumcision.

Cornelius

While Peter was in Joppa with Tabitha, Cornelius, up in the region of Caesarea, saw a vision from the Lord telling him to send men to Joppa and tell Peter to come back with them to Caesarea. Cornelius was a Gentile, a centurion of the Italian cohort. He and his household feared God, and gave many alms to the Jewish people and prayed to God regularly. He was sincere and devout about his beliefs, but he was not a saved man. God seemed to answer his prayers because of how he treated Israel; those who bless Israel will themselves be blessed (Genesis 12:3). Although Israel had rejected the Kingdom, the following 35 years was a cycling down period as we see the diminishing of Israel (Romans 11:12). During this time of diminishing we see miracles, two gospels being preached and a number of other confusing confluences of events. All of these things settle down as we work through the Book of Acts until the focus is completely on Paul and his ministry to the Body of Christ.

Peter is learning something very important in his meeting with Cornelius. God is showing him that Israel is no longer the "go-to" nation and is being replaced by a new work of God. He is now putting Israel aside as the means to reach the world and will be working through the Apostle Paul and his work with the Gentiles.

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