

Introduction to Acts and the Restoration of Israel

Commentators have long perplexed about Luke's purpose in writing the book of Acts. Conzelmann said it was to chronicle the establishment of the church as a long term entity in light of the failed parousia. In fact, many commentators see Acts as almost an apology on Luke's part for a failed eschatology. The church has now been established only because Christ has not come!

Others say it is to tell the story of the work of the Spirit. Some commentators, not necessarily agreeing with the failed eschatology view, nonetheless tell us that Acts is about the establishment of the church, now that Israel has rejected her Messiah. There are shades of this view, including the dispensational view that sees Acts as unrelated to the fulfillment of God's Old Covenant promises made to Israel.

Few commentators see Acts as the story of the restoration of Israel as foretold by the prophets. It is refreshing and exciting, to know that this is changing. A growing number of scholars now see Acts as the story of fulfillment, not failure, on the part of God and Israel. In what follows, I hope to convey the reality that Acts is about the restoration of Israel. It is about the fulfillment of God's promises to her, as interpreted through the Spirit inspired author.

What I will present is not exhaustive by any means. In fact, I will only be able to hit some highlights. However, I hope to present enough evidence to convince the reader to pursue this theme further. I have produced a fifty two lesson series in MP3 format that covers more of the marvelous insights that Luke offers us into the hope of Israel; available at www.eschatology.org.

Acts 1

Acts 1:4–6 Jesus showed himself alive for forty days, teaching his disciples about the kingdom. Nothing could more clearly demonstrate that Luke was about to embark on a discussion of the fulfillment of Israel's promises than this. During his ministry, Jesus focused on the promises of Israel: He came to "seek and to save the lost" a referent to the lost of Israel.

The kingdom was the heart and core of God's promises to Israel (2 Samuel 7:13-14). It was the focus of the prophets of Israel (Isaiah 2-4; Ezekiel 37, etc.). Thus, Acts 1:4 "set the tone" for the rest of the book. The kingdom message is continued in Acts 8, 14, 19, 20, and 28 as well. This makes it clear that Luke never abandons the subject. Acts is about the hope of Israel. While most commentators claim that the disciples still misunderstood Jesus and the kingdom, this is patently false. Jesus had opened the minds of his disciples to understand the scriptures (Luke 24:25-27). Thus, the disciples were simply asking about the time of the fulfillment of what Jesus had been instructing them about. Jesus did not chide the disciples for their "ignorance" or failure to understand. Instead, he told them to "go into the city and wait" for the promise of the Spirit. The promise of the Spirit was itself an OT promise to Israel and for Israel, to raise her from the dead, restore her to God's presence, and result in the offer of salvation to the nations (Isaiah 32:49; Ezekiel 37; Joel 2-3).

The disciples remembered the ministry of John the Immerser when Jesus mentioned the promise of the Spirit. The relationship between John, the promise of the Spirit and the kingdom cannot be missed. John proclaimed, "the time is fulfilled, the kingdom of heaven has drawn near" (Matthew 3; Mark 1). He likewise promised that the Messiah would baptize them "in the Spirit and with fire," echoing Isaiah 4:4, and Joel 2.

The imminence of the kingdom— the fulfillment of John and Jesus' message— is strongly indicated in the link between the promise of the Spirit and the fact that Jesus told his disciples to go into the city and to wait for the Spirit. Since the outpouring of the Spirit and the establishment of the kingdom are inseparably connected, this tells us that the restoration of Israel was truly near. It cannot be imagined that the disciples divorced the promise of the imminent reception of the Spirit from the kingdom promises.

You Are My Witnesses— The Creation (Re-Creation) of Israel

After promising the Spirit to the disciples, Jesus immediately told them they would be his witnesses. This is a direct echo of Isaiah 43:10 and this, like Jesus' forty day instructions concerning the kingdom is strongly suggestive that the restoration of Israel, an Israel now identified by her connection to Jesus, but Israel nonetheless, was now taking place.

Isaiah 43 foretold the creation of a new people that would be YHVH's witnesses to the nations. And now, in Acts 1 we find the twelve apostles—representing the righteous remnant—being given the commission to be his witnesses to the nations.

The radical and revolutionary nature of what Isaiah 43 foretold, and what was happening in Acts, is revealed when we consider that YHVH called on Israel to not remember the former things, but, to look to the “New Thing” that He would do (43:18). What is so astounding is that YHVH, in context, called on Israel *to forget the first exodus!* That event was the single most normative and formative event in all of Israel's history, and yet, God said the time was coming when they would need to forget that historic event and look to the greater “New Thing,” that He would do.

Given the indisputable fact that Acts is built around the “Second Exodus” motif, it is clear that the “New Thing” promised by YHVH in Isaiah 43 was now taking place, which meant not only that Israel was being “restored,” but that she was to forget her first beginnings and look to the last.

Isaiah 11 and a host of other Old Testament prophecies foretold that at the time of that Second Exodus the word of God would “fill the earth” calling first of all, the scattered children of Israel, and then the nations to the Lord. As Jesus told his disciples to begin their mission in Jerusalem- Zion- he said they would then go from Judea to Samaria, and from there to the uttermost parts of the earth (Greek word, *ge*). They were to go to “the Jew first, and then the Greek” just as the prophets foretold.

Acts 2

I will not develop it here, but it is no coincidence that the events took place on Pentecost. That auspicious day was the last of the first four of Israel's major feast days. It was sometimes called the Feast of First Fruit, and the events of that day were indeed the fulfillment of that typological feast, for on that day, 3000 individuals joined themselves to the body of the New Israel, as the first fruit of the harvest (James 1:18). The re-gathering of Israel is seen in the names of the countries represented that day. All of the nations mentioned are from the nations of the diaspora, where Israel had been scattered in the previous dispersions. But now, on the day of Pentecost, representatives of the scattered tribes of Israel were in Jerusalem and the

events of that day comprised fulfillment, at least initially, of the re-gathering of the diaspora.

“This is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel”- Acts 2:15ff

The outpouring of the Spirit on Pentecost was in fulfillment of Acts 1, and even more importantly, of Joel 2:28-32. Peter’s words leave no room for controversy. The events of that day were what Joel predicted: “This is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel.” Words could not be clearer, more emphatic, or undeniable. Joel foretold the consummative last days, the coming of the Day of the Lord, the salvation of the remnant and the calling of the nations. It is one of the key OT prophecies, and inextricably tied to the restoration of Israel. But, Joel was not alone in predicting the outpouring of the Spirit in the last days, for the restoration of Israel. Isaiah 32 and Ezekiel 37 and Micah 7 are but a few of the significant OT prophecies of the outpouring of the Spirit in the last days.

In fact, there is not a topic or theme that is more intensely eschatological, or, more directly tied to the restoration of Israel than this subject. According to Ezekiel 37:11-14 the Spirit would be poured out to raise Israel from the dead. Thus, for Peter to declare, “this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel” cannot properly be construed as anything but a declaration that the restoration of Israel was taking place. Jesus often shocked and offended his contemporaries with his identification of the true Israel, and the nature of the restoration of Israel under his rule. Likewise, Peter’s declaration of the fulfillment of Joel and the other Spirit / Restoration promises was a radical departure from what they thought was to happen in the last days work of the Spirit. But, this revolutionary identification of the true Israel and the fulfillment of Israel’s promises was just beginning in Luke’s account. There was much, much more to come.

David Is Not Ascended, But...

David was the ultimate king of Israel. Under him, Israel reached the height of her glory, putting down her enemies, reveling in the presence of God, enjoying the blessings of the Covenant. It was because of David’s accomplishments, as a man after God’s own heart, that he became known as the type of the coming of Messiah. In fact, the promises of the kingdom, and the restoration of the kingdom, are so intimately tied to David, that the

kingdom promises are often referred to simply as the Davidic Kingdom promises.

Peter declared on Pentecost that God had sworn to raise up the seed of David to sit on His throne. That prophecy, said Peter, spoke of the resurrection of Jesus, and had now been fulfilled. Astoundingly, he noted that it was not David who had ascended into the heavens to be enthroned, but Jesus, who had now been declared as “Lord and Christ” (v.36). This was a prima facie statement that the Davidic promise of the kingdom was being fulfilled!

“Sit At My Right Hand Until I Make Thine Enemies Thy Footstool...”

The preceding point is driven home when one sees the connection between Peter’s assertion that Jesus had been given the throne of David, and this conflates with his exaltation to the right hand of the majesty on high, in fulfillment of Psalms 110. In other words, the promise of the Davidic throne and kingdom are inextricably tied to Messiah sitting at the right hand. These are not disparate motifs or promises. And here is what is so astounding. Psalms 110 is cited and quoted more times in the NT than any other OT prophecy, and without disputation, is affirmed as fulfilled in Christ who was raised from the dead and seated at the right hand of the Father in the heavenly places (cf. Ephesians 1:19f).

So, Christ’s ascension and enthronement at the right hand was the fulfillment (the initiation of fulfillment) of Psalms 110. But, Psalms 110 was the promise of the exaltation of Messiah to the throne of David. Thus, the exaltation of Christ to the right hand— affirmed by Peter on Pentecost— was an assertion that the Davidic kingdom was being established. But of course, once again we see the radical and revolutionary nature of the nature of fulfillment exposed. David’s throne was a literal, physical throne, over a geo-politico-military kingdom, spatially confined to the land of Canaan. Messiah was to sit on the throne of David and rule over the kingdom.

But, Peter affirmed through the Spirit, that Jesus was now Christ (the promised Messiah) sitting on the throne of David “in the heavens”, where Psalms 110 said Messiah would sit— in David’s kingdom. Peter’s declaration meant that the very nature of the kingdom was being— had been— fundamentally transformed into a spiritual kingdom. The Old Creation, that

which was to be forgotten, was now radically transformed into the New Thing which Israel was to accept.

Acts 3– The Restoration of All Things

Shortly after the auspicious events of Pentecost, Peter and John went to the temple. As they entered, we find the famous account of the healing of the lame man, and the ensuing sermon by Peter. The apostle responded to the amazement of the audience by calling on them to repent in the name (i.e. in the authority, into the name and authority) of Jesus. He urged them to repent so that God would grant them “the times of refreshing” (which is a period of respite before judgment) because before the sending of Jesus from heaven. That parousia would consummate “the restoration of all things.” Nothing would communicate to a Jewish audience more convincingly, more clearly, that her cherished restoration had begun than Peter’s reference to “the restoration of all things.” Peter was clear: the restoration he was talking about was the hope and promise of all of the OT prophet, “all who have ever spoken.” And, Peter is equally emphatic, “they spoke of these days.” Likewise, the nature of that restoration is delineated in the text: God sent Jesus to bless you by taking away your sin.

Acts 4

Sometimes it almost seems as if Acts 4 is almost forgotten in the discussions of eschatology and even ecclesiology. This is lamentable, for this chapter loudly proclaims that Israel’s restoration, via the long anticipated Messianic Temple, had begun.

Numerous OT prophecies spoke of the coming “Stone” which would be both the foundation of the Messianic Temple, as well as the instrument of judgment against both houses of Israel. (See my *The Elements Shall Melt With Fervent Heat* book for a fuller discussion of this important motif, as it is developed by Jesus, Paul and Peter in the NT). The stunning thing that Peter does is to take Psalms 118:22 “the stone that the builders rejected has become the chief corner stone” and makes it extremely personal “This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the chief cornerstone” (4:11-ESV). It could not get much more personal than that!

But of course, what is so remarkable is that Peter takes Israel's expectation of an end times literal temple and says that the prophecies referred to a temple built on the person of Messiah, not literal stones. If the foundation of the anticipated Messianic Temple is the living Messiah, then surely the super structure cannot be physical stones, and this fundamentally redefines the nature of the restoration of Israel.

The Kings of the Earth Have Set Themselves... Against the Lord and Against His Anointed

Contra the modern dispensational doctrine that says the Jewish rejection of Jesus postponed the kingdom offer to Israel, the nascent church in Jerusalem, led by the apostles had a totally different view of that rejection—it was foretold.

When Peter and John were released by the Sanhedrin, they went back to the congregation and reported all that had taken place. At the report, the congregation responded in unison it seems, by singing Psalms 2:1.

What is missed so often is that not only did the Psalmist predict the rejection of Messiah, it likewise clearly stated that *the rejection would not in any way thwart God's sovereign will*: “The one who sits in the heavens laughs. He will hold them in derision. Then He will speak to them in His Wrath... Yet (meaning, in spite of the rejection of Messiah, DKP) have I set my King on my holy hill.” Notice that “Yet.” It forcefully declares that man's best (worst) efforts to delay, to alter, to postpone, to nullify God's plans would fail. In fact, the rejection was part of God's plan!

Acts 4 thus serves as a very powerful testimony to the on-going restoration of Israel. Her promised Messianic Temple now had the foundation in place, and those who had rejected that Stone would, therefore, lie under the impending judgment of that rejection. Furthermore, while that rejection was initially not understood by Jesus' disciples (cf. Luke 24:21f), they now fully understood the necessary role of that suffering for Messiah to “enter into his glory.” (Remember the forty days of kingdom instruction by Jesus and the subsequent outpouring of the Spirit).

Acts 4-7– Preparing the Way For the Removal of the Old - The Full Establishment of the New

I will give here only a few of the highlights from these three chapters

1.) Luke's recounting of the on-going powerful demonstration of the work of the Spirit brings to mind how Israel was led by the Spirit in the first exodus (Isaiah 63:10f) and yet, Israel rebelled against YHVH, leading to judgment. Of course, it is critical to note that the references to the work of the Spirit must be viewed from the perspective of Acts 2 and Peter's affirmation that Israel's anticipated last days were present.

2.) Selling the Land– We have here no abiding City... In chapter 4-5 we find the account of the nascent body of Christ doing something absolutely incredible. The disciples are selling their land! To modern readers, far removed from the mind-set of the ancient Jews, and Torah, the incredible implications of these actions are all but lost.

It is almost impossible to over-emphasize the importance of the land to the Jews. It was their inheritance from YHVH Himself. When the land was allotted to the twelve tribes (Joshua 13ff) the Lord instructed Israel: 'The land shall not be sold permanently, for the land is Mine; for you are strangers and sojourners with Me' (Leviticus 25:23). While it was permissible for Israelites to temporarily sell their land, the Jubilee Laws provided that ownership of the land would revert to the original tribal owners in the Jubilee years.

Yet, in Acts 4-5 we find the selling of the land by the Jewish Christians. There is no suggestion that they intended to redeem the land at a later date, (Cf. Jeremiah 32). The record seems to indicate that they were simply selling their land, permanently. In light of Jesus' Olivet Discourse, and the warnings in Acts 2-4, of impending judgment on Jerusalem and Israel, the full significance of this comes to the forefront. Those early Christians knew that the value of Jerusalem real estate was going to go to Zero! They now were beginning to realize, as Hebrews would later declare: "We have here no abiding city, but, look for one that is about to come" (Hebrews 13:14).

3.) The Sanhedrin imprisoned Peter and John, but, an angel of the Lord freed them, and they immediately began preaching once again in the Temple (Acts 5). What is so remarkable– and mostly overlooked– is that when the angel

released them from prison, he instructed them to “speak to all the people all the words of this Life” (5:20). This is a remarkable and beautiful statement. The words of Jesus, the words about Jesus, were and are the words of Life!

In sharp contrast, when the Sanhedrin brought Peter and John back to trial, they said, “We strictly charged you not to teach in this name, yet, you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching, and intend to bring this man’s blood upon us” (5:28). Ironic is it not, that these very men had cried out only a short time before: “Let his blood be on us and on our children!” (Matthew 27:25)? Yet now, with the implications of what has transpired in the resurrection of Jesus and the proclamation of that awesome event, they see the implications and are pleading “innocence.” Peter had told that august body that they had rejected the chief corner stone of the predicted Messianic temple. That could only mean one thing: Judgment was coming on them. They understood that while Peter and John were speaking the words of Life to the people, that this meant judgment on them for killing the Prince of Life.

4.) Spatial limitations forbid a full development of Stephen’s Temple discourse. However, it is clear that Stephen, in recounting Israel’s “history,” has a deeply theological point to make, and the history that he gives is focused on that particular point. He was not intending to recount Israel’s entire history. What he patently does do, however, is to show that Abraham was blessed by God while he was outside the land. Stephen shows Israel’s long history of rejecting God’s prophets. He shows how the Lord judged them for their rebellion. He shows how their emphasis on the temple itself was misplaced, for it was never God’s ultimate intent to dwell in temples made with hands.

All of this sequels perfectly with what Luke has already recorded. The chief cornerstone for the Messianic Temple had been laid. Those who had rejected that Stone could now only anticipate impending judgment. And now, Stephen reinforces that message by pointing out that the glorious temple in which he was now standing was never God’s eschatological goal.

So, lying latent in chapters 4-7 is an extremely powerful narrative. Israel’s last days prophecies were being fulfilled. They were not, however, being fulfilled as anticipated or desired. They were being fulfilled in the body of Christ, the foundation stone of the Messianic Temple— a living Temple—

offering Life. But, all of this meant that the Old Temple, the Old World which was the “ministration of death” was about to be swept away.

Acts 8– To Samaria and the Uttermost Parts of the Earth

In his instructions on the kingdom, Jesus had told his apostles that they would be his witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and then to the uttermost parts of the earth. From Acts 2-8:1-4 we find that the Jerusalem church was perfectly happy initially to confine their efforts to Jerusalem and Judea. However, in the Lord’s providence, persecution arose, and those who were persecuted were eager then to share the story of Life everywhere they went. And they went to Samaria.

Although the city was not named Samaria as such until the time of Omri (1 Kings 16:24f) nonetheless, the region of Samaria had long been considered as almost a synonym for the dispersed northern tribes. Due to Omri’s horrible wickedness, and the entire history of the divided kingdom that was inextricably tied to that, the stigma of rebellion against God was paramount in the mind of those in Judea. (You can get a small sense of the Jewish antipathy toward Samaria, and vice versa, in Luke 9:51f, where a Samaritan city refused to allow Jesus and his disciples to pass through, and John, the “apostle of love” wanted Jesus to call down fire from heaven on them)!

Prophetically, part and parcel of Israel’s eschatological hope was the restoration of the diaspora. God would gather them from the east and the west, and bring them back to Him. Israel’s nationalistic hope was a literally re-gathering to the physical land when the Messianic kingdom was established. Acts 8 falsifies such notions.

Philip was one of those who went to Samaria, and there preached “the Christ” i.e. the Messiah! He confirmed the message of Jesus as Messiah by performing undeniable miracles. The miraculous work of the Spirit was poured out in earthly Israel's last days, when the Lord would bring the tribes back together under Messiah (Ezekiel). The Spirit was to usher in the promised restoration of the kingdom by Messiah, thus creating and restoring the heavenly Israel. The evidence of this is when Philip was manifesting the miraculous work of the Spirit, declaring Jesus as the promised Messiah, and preaching "the good news about the kingdom of God" (Acts 8:12). (Note: Philip’s message of the kingdom could hardly be classified as “good news” if in fact, per the dispensationalists, the kingdom had been postponed!).

We may not be stretching the text too far to take note of the similarities between Philip and Moses, the first exodus and the Second. In the first exodus, Israel was in bondage. In the Second, Israel, particularly the northern tribes, were still considered to be in bondage. In the first exodus, Moses was sent to those in bondage to set them free, but, was confronted by false magicians. In the Second Exodus, Philip goes to those in bondage and is confronted with a false magician. In both cases, God's chosen messenger triumphs over the false magicians and as a result, the Exodus proceeds.

The Ethiopian Eunuch— A Radical Fulfillment

To me personally, the story of the Ethiopian eunuch is one of the most compelling, the most exciting stories in Acts, and beautifully illustrates and proves that Luke's narrative must indeed be understood as focused on the restoration of Israel as foretold by the prophets.

Under Torah, any man with injury to his genitalia in any way, was forbidden to enter the Temple, or to serve in the ministry (Deuteronomy 23). It was critical under the Law to be able to marry and produce "children of God" and thereby sustain the kingdom. This was the nature of the kingdom. But, as a result of being unable to produce children, eunuchs were called "dry trees."

However, the prophets foretold a time when this would no longer be the case. Isaiah 56 predicted the time of a radically different kind of Temple worship and service. In this New Temple, both the foreigner and the eunuch would be given a name better than "sons and daughters" (56:5). Note that this is true of both the *foreigner* and the eunuch. This is significant, but we cannot develop it here.

In many commentaries, and certainly in countless homiletic presentations, the story of the eunuch is used as a story to speak of how God will now accept those of any nation, of any ethnic group. Emphasis is normally on the fact that the man was an Ethiopian. However, this is misplaced. The emphasis in the Greek is on the fact that the man was a *eunuch*, not that he was an Ethiopian. This eunuch had just returned from Jerusalem. Although he had gone up to that awesome temple to worship there. But, although he was allowed to bring his sacrifices, he was still very much an outsider per Deuteronomy 23. The point of Acts 8 is that the time had come for eunuchs

and foreigners to be given the name “better than sons and daughters.” The time had come when eunuchs and foreigners would serve in the New Temple of God, the foundation of which, Messiah Jesus, had been laid in “Zion.” The time had come when eunuchs would no longer be “dry trees” for they, by sharing the news of “the Life” in Messiah, could bring forth “sons of God” without “marrying and giving in marriage.”

What cannot be missed in the prediction of the acceptance of the foreigners and the eunuchs is that it would take place when the Lord “re-gathered” the “outcasts of Israel” i.e. at the restoration of Israel. And, when He had re-gathered the outcasts, i.e. the diaspora of Israel, he would also gather “others besides those whom He had gathered.” So, the acceptance of the eunuchs into the “temple of God” was a signal that Israel’s restoration was in process, and with that restoration, it signaled that others besides Israel could be gathered to the Lord as well.

Acts 9– The Persecution of “The Way” - The Conversion of Saul

Saul, later to become Paul, is presented as a persecutor of “the way.” This term is highly significant. Numerous OT prophecies foretold that in the last days, there would be a “highway of the Lord” on which the righteous would travel. On that highway, there would be safety, security and righteousness (Isaiah 35). But, the highway would also be the “Way” for the coming of the Lord in judgment.

Isaiah foretold the coming of “the voice of one crying in the wilderness, ‘Prepare the way of the Lord’” (Isaiah 40:3). John the Baptizer was that Voice (Mark 1). What should not be missed is that not only would the “Way” be a highway of blessings, but, it would also be the highway for the coming of the Lord in judgment (Isaiah 40:10f; Malachi 3:1-3). So, once again, we see the good news/bad news aspect of the fulfillment of Israel’s last days prophecies. Also, this time of the establishment of the Way, would be when the redeemed of the Lord would once again be gathered to Him (40:1, 9f). This is the restoration of Israel. See Acts 19:9; 24:14; 24:22 where the term “the Way” is used in a technical manner to speak of “the faith.”

The conversion of Paul is incredibly significant, to understate the case. His understanding of his mission gives insight into God’s Old Covenant prophecies of Israel’s last days. From the very beginning, Paul informs his

Jewish brethren that God had called him distinctively to be a light to the Gentiles, to call them out of darkness, and to give them invitation to the salvation that would flow from Israel. One of the saddest realities in modern evangelicism is the idea that the calling of the Gentiles, i.e. Paul's mission, was a direct result of Israel's failure. All three futurist eschatologies, perhaps on differing levels, but true of them all nonetheless, posit the failure of Israel as the ground and reason for the Gentile mission. This is patently false.

We cannot develop this, but, note that Paul says that his ministry was foretold in Deuteronomy 32:19f, which was a prediction of Israel's last days. While Paul certainly does say that Israel's rebellion would lead to that ministry, it must be understood that, contra the dispensational paradigm, that rebellion and the final rejection of the Old Covenant body of Israel was pre-planned and predicted by God. It was no accident; it was no surprise to the Lord.

The concept of the salvation of the remnant is fundamentally important here, for Paul informs us— with proof from the Old Testament— that God never promised to save “all Israel” but, only a remnant (Romans 9-11). Again, Paul tells us that God chose him personally and distinctively to call the Gentiles to Him. And yet, as Paul went to the Gentiles, he went first to the diaspora scattered abroad. And when the Jews in those diaspora areas rejected the gospel of the kingdom, Paul told them “it was necessary that the gospel be preached to you first, but, seeing that you count yourselves unworthy of eternal life, we turn to the Gentiles” Acts 13:46). Notice Paul's appeal to Isaiah 49:6f also as the justification for his Gentile mission (13:47).

Once again, however, it is imperative to note, for instance in Isaiah 49, that the salvation of the Gentiles was *totally dependent on the restoration of Israel*: “It is too small a thing that You should be My Servant To raise up the tribes of Jacob, And to restore the preserved ones of Israel; I will also give You as a light to the Gentiles, That You should be My salvation to the ends of the earth.” Notice that the restoration of the “tribes of Jacob” was the precursor to the calling of the Gentiles. Note also that the salvation of the tribes of Jacob would be “too small” of a work for Messiah and YHVH. God's plan was, therefore, always, to offer salvation and life to those outside the tribes of Israel, and Paul was the one chosen to take that message of “the life” to them. (See Colossians 1:24f and my special study on Paul's distinctive ministry in *Who Is This Babylon?* This is a very important topic)

Acts 10– The Calling of the Gentiles

Any reader of Acts should have been alerted that something like this was going to happen. The conversion of the eunuch laid the groundwork for opening the mind of the reader that even more revolutionary things were coming, and Acts 10 records that very thing. We today have 20/20 hindsight and years of instruction telling us how the Old Testament predicted the salvation of the Gentiles.

Yet, in Israel of Jesus' day, and in Paul's, while there was a vague concept of the calling of the Gentiles, there was no true appreciation or, welcoming of that idea. When Jesus was in the synagogue in Capernaum (Luke 4) his telling of two of the famous stories in Israel's history recounted the blessings of pagan Gentiles, and not those of the seed of Abraham. And that crowd sought to kill Jesus for pointing that out.

Solomon had prayed for the Lord to bless those who were not of the seed of Abraham, if they prayed to Him and came to worship Him at the Jerusalem Temple (1 Kings 8:41f). And, the temple had a "Court of the Gentiles" but, of course, the temple likewise had the wall of partition that kept the Gentiles – including the eunuchs, remember– from the inner courts. But, in Israel of Jesus' day, in spite of her own prophecies, there was no desire to call the Gentiles. In fact, when Paul told the temple audience that God had appointed him to preach to the Gentiles, and call them to be His people, they instantly took up stones to kill him (Acts 21; 22:17f).

It is little wonder then, that when Peter, faithful Jew that he was, was told by God Himself, to "take and eat" the foods that were unclean under Torah, that Peter refused, and extrapolated from that to Gentile uncleanness. While Peter uttered some fair sounding words, "God has shown me to call nothing common or unclean" in his heart, and verbalized to Cornelius, he felt very strongly, "It is not lawful for a man that is a Jew to have company or to eat with a Gentile" (Acts 10:28).

Nonetheless, Peter preached "the Life" to Cornelius, and he, along with his entourage, was astounded that the Holy Spirit was poured out on Cornelius, just as it had been poured out on the disciples on Pentecost. This was as powerful– if not more so– as the heavenly vision with the unclean animals, in convincing Peter and those with him that the Gentiles truly were now

equals in the kingdom. But, as we shall see, not all were thrilled with this development. They believed that the kingdom of Messiah was to be a Jewish kingdom, and while they were “okay” with the inclusion of the Gentiles, they made it clear that if they wanted to be a part of the kingdom, they essentially had to become Jews and observe Torah.

A Great Famine Arose

One ponders if we are to see the parallels between the story of Joseph in Egypt, the famine, the rescue of the people from the famine and the events of Acts 11:27f. For sure, the name of the Lord was exalted and glorified in both situations.

Acts 13– The Movement Away From Jerusalem

“What God promised to the fathers, He has fulfilled...” (Acts 13:32f) Addressing the Jewish audience in the synagogue in Antioch of Pisidia, Paul rehearsed Israel’s history and her promises. He recounts the faithfulness of God in giving the land as promised (13:19f) the glory of David and then, in what must have been a startling and amazing statement, claimed that God had now “brought to Israel a Savior, Jesus, just as He promised” (13:23).

Paul’s message to Israel was one of fulfillment, not of failure or postponement. In fact, he says that God had given to Jesus, “the sure mercies of David” which was nothing but the promise of the Davidic kingdom (Isaiah 55)! But of course, if Jesus had been given the throne of David, then since Christ was in heaven, not on an earthly throne ruling over a nationalistic kingdom centered in Jerusalem, this meant that the nature of the Messianic kingdom was radically different from what they had thought it was to be. The promises were being fulfilled. Of this there can be no doubt.

But, the form of fulfillment was something totally unexpected. Something had begun to happen in Acts 11:19 through Acts 13f that must have been troublesome to the Jewish Christians who were still struggling with the geocentricity of Zion / Jerusalem in the OT prophecies. It is not too much to say that in the prophetic books Zion is the capital and the focus of all things eschatological and soteriological. The Law would go forth from Zion and the Messianic Temple (Isaiah 2:2f). Salvation would be in Jerusalem (Isaiah 46:13). The resurrection and the Messianic Banquet would occur “on this mountain” i.e. Zion (Isaiah 25:6-8).

So, for those with the desire and intent to see the OT prophets fulfilled literally, what was taking place had to be unsettling. They could not deny the miraculous works of the promised Spirit that they witnessed, but, where was the emphasis on the literal Jerusalem, the literal temple, and the Levitical priesthood? Truly, something radical was taking place. In fact, the perceived (and in truth, very real) movement away from earthly Jerusalem was part and parcel of the Old Testament prophetic message. According to those prophets, earthly Jerusalem would pass, but, heavenly Jerusalem would triumph. A host of OT prophecies foretold the destruction of the earthly Zion in the last days, giving way to the New Creation and the New Jerusalem (cf. Isaiah 65-66).

Jeremiah had actually foretold the time, when the two houses of Israel would be re-united under Messiah, that, “They shall say no more, ‘The ark of the covenant of the Lord; neither shall it come to mind, neither shall they remember it; neither shall they visit it; neither shall that be done any more’” (Jeremiah 3:16). Likewise, even the much later prophet, Malachi, foresaw the time when “in every place (i.e. Gentile places!, DKP) incense shall be offered unto my name, for my name shall be great among the heathen” (Malachi 1:11). Very clearly, contrary to a great deal of Jewish expectation about the nature of the restored kingdom, Biblically, in the Messianic Kingdom, Jerusalem would lose its centrality. While the Kingdom would be established “in Zion” the New Covenant would flow from there to the nations, and that Old earthly city would lose its theological centrality.

This is precisely what we see in Acts. Initially, the Jews kept the Word to themselves. However, persecution forced them to leave Judea and Jerusalem, and once they did, the Gentiles eagerly accepted the Word of Life. In Acts 11ff we find that increasingly, physical Jerusalem declines in importance for the body of Christ. Antioch becomes the Gentile capital of the church, and from there, the Word of Life expands increasingly to the Gentile world. At the same time, Old Jerusalem— which had sponsored Saul in his persecutions— became increasingly hostile against the New Jerusalem. As Paul would write at a very early stage, her persecutorial ways would lead to her being cast out of the Presence of the Lord (Galatians 4:22f; 1 Thessalonians 2; 2 Thessalonians 1).

Acts 15– To This Agrees The Prophets

With the initiation of the conversion of the Gentiles, the expansion of the kingdom was in full swing. Over and over we are told that “much people were added to the Lord” (cf. 11:21, 24). But, brewing under the surface in ways that we can only speculate about, were discussions among the Jewish Christians about the role of the Gentiles in the kingdom. Some began to advance the idea that since the kingdom was a promise to Israel, found in Israel’s prophets, that the kingdom was intrinsically Jewish in form and function. Thus, “certain men which came down (to Antioch, DKP) from Judea taught the brethren, and said, ‘Except you are circumcised after the manner of Moses, you cannot be saved’” (Acts 15:1). Thus, intriguingly, the first substantial doctrinal error in the early church originated in earthly Jerusalem, and *misconstrued the very nature of the kingdom of Messiah*. The issue of circumcision would continue to plague the early church, and may in fact be considered the single most important controversy of the first century. Yet, this subject is grossly ignored or misunderstood by most Bible students today. It was the identifying mark of the children of Abraham. It gave them “title deed” as it were to the land promises. No circumcision, no land. It was that simple (cf. Joshua 5).

Since circumcision was the key marker of the identity of the “sons of Abraham” then the restoration of Israel would, in the mind of those with the literalistic mind-set, demand the imposition of circumcision on any and all who were coming into the kingdom. So, just like under Torah, when a Gentile wished to become a servant of YHVH, that same mindset. There is little wonder that some of the zealous Jews in Jerusalem believed that Gentiles had to be circumcised. The promises of blessings in the Seed, Abraham’s (One) Seed, were *perceived* to be tied, not to circumcision of the heart, but to physical circumcision. (It should be noted that modern Dominionism (i.e. postmillennialism) as well as Dispensationalism, both implicitly demand a restoration of physical circumcision. Dominionism, along with Dispensationalism, says Abraham and his descendants must inherit the literal land. But, if the physical land promises remain valid, then physical circumcision remains valid. The land promise and circumcision are inextricably bound. Thus, if the land promises remain valid, circumcision remains valid and the gospel of Christ is nullified. I cannot develop this further, but, this is a serious issue).

The battle was joined between Paul, Barnabas, and the Judaizers. Paul taught a Torah free gospel of justification of faith. The Judaizers taught justification through faith in the flesh. A conference was called in Jerusalem for the inspired leadership of the church to debate and settle the issue. At the Jerusalem conference, James and the apostles and prophets determined that Paul's gospel was correct – Gentiles were not to be circumcised or compelled in any way to observe Torah. Observance of the Law of Moses was not incumbent on them for their justification and salvation. Peter reminded the audience of the example of Cornelius, and how the outpouring of the Spirit on that occasion demonstrated that, “he made no distinction between us and them, having cleansed their heart by faith” (15:9).

Barnabas and Paul followed, recounting the work of the Spirit in their ministry to the Gentiles. James then followed their presentations, recalling again Peter's experience with Cornelius in which God signified His divine purpose “to take from them a people for his name” (15:14). What James said next proves that the restoration of Israel was fully underway, but, once again, that restoration was not at all what the nation of Israel had envisioned or hoped for (cf. Romans 11:7) but, it was what the prophets actually foretold, as interpreted by the Jerusalem council. James quoted Amos 9:11 which foretold the restoration of the ten northern tribes with the southern tribes. God would “repair the breaches in the wall” of the Davidic house (not the literal temple), and He would accomplish this “so that the remnant of men may seek the Lord.” It is critical to grasp the significance of this.

Amos predicted, and James interpreted Amos as saying, that when Israel was restored, the Gentiles would be called to be God's people (cf. Zechariah 2:10f). In fact, God would restore Israel “so that” (the force of the Greek) the rest of mankind might seek the Lord. So, the order of occurrence was first the restoration of Israel, then, as a result of that, the nations would be called. This is what Isaiah 49 foretold. It is Paul's message that the gospel of salvation was “to the Jew first, then the Greek” (Romans 1:16-17).

So, when James declared that the calling of the Gentiles was in fulfillment of Amos, and explained, through the inspiration of the Spirit, that Amos had foretold the restoration of Israel *so that* the nations could be called, this was a profound commentary on the nature of the restoration of Israel. James' commentary demands this fact: If Israel was not being restored, in fulfillment of Amos, then the nations, the Gentiles, i.e. those not of the

twelve tribes, have no hope of being the children of God. It is that simple: Israel was to be restored *so that* the Gentiles could be offered salvation. Since the Gentiles, as proven by Cornelius's reception of the Spirit, were clearly now accepted by God, on equal footing with Israel, then Israel's restoration was in full bloom.

Acts 16-21– To the Uttermost Parts of the World– Paul's Mission And Role As End Times Martyr and Prophet

While a great deal could be written of the individual accounts of the cities where Paul traveled space forbids such an investigation or extended discussion. However, what we do need to keep in mind is that lying behind Paul's travels is his role as God's distinctively chosen vessel to fulfill the mystery of God, and to fill up the measure of end times suffering, thus, hastening the Day of the Lord. Paul is clear that, "God has exhibited us apostles as last of all, like men sentenced to death" (1 Corinthians 4:9). The imagery is of a Roman triumphant parade, with the host of prisoners taken captive by the conquering hero, marching to their deaths. And Paul says the apostles were the last in the line, determined (manifested, proclaimed, shown) by God to be His martyrs to fill up the eschatological measure of suffering and sin. (Cf. Revelation 18:20-24).

In Colossians 1:24-27 Paul affirms in unequivocal but challenging language that he was chosen, and distinctively commissioned to personally, "fill up in my body what is lacking in the sufferings of Christ.. And to fulfill the Word of God, the mystery." Acts 16-21 chronicles Paul's travels and his suffering. Everywhere he went, the Jews either attacked him, or instigated persecution against him. We see at work in Paul's ministry, three aspects of the end times prophecies:

A.) Paul, in offering the gospel of Life to the Gentiles, was attempting to make Israel jealous, to hopefully convert some of them. This was in direct fulfillment of Deuteronomy 32- The Song of Moses– which foretold that in Israel's last days, God would provoke Israel to jealousy (32:19f→ Romans 10:19; 11:14).

B.) While Paul was the apostle to the Gentiles, as we have seen, he went first of all to Israel, scattered Israel, for this was "necessary" (Acts 13– see above). Yet, God had foretold, based on Israel's long history of

recalcitrance, that, “All day long I have stretched out my hands to a disobedient and contrary people” (Isaiah 65:1– Romans 10:21).

C.) The salvation of the remnant. While the nation, corporately speaking, rejected the kingdom offer, this was not in any way surprising, unexpected, or un-foretold. Isaiah, and the other prophets, had foretold this centuries before. So, just as Isaiah foretold that Israel would reject God’s outstretched hands, and fill the measure of her sin (Isaiah 65:1-6) he likewise foretold that a remnant would be saved when the Lord destroyed the Old Israel and created a New People (Isaiah 65:8-19).

So, what was playing out in these chapters of Acts, as Luke recorded Paul’s ministry, is not, in any way at all, the record of the failure of God’s plan as predicted in Israel’s prophecies. God’s plan was right on schedule, just as foretold. It was shocking to the nationalistic expectation of the Jews—resulting in their animosity toward Paul— but, it was God’s original plan all along.

Acts 21-28— Nothing But the Hope of Israel

As Luke focuses on the ministry of Paul, from Acts 13 onward, something becomes very apparent. The Jewish animosity toward him grows as his success among the Gentiles continues to grow. It is more than obvious that Paul’s adversaries think that his message of Christ as Messiah and the Torah free gospel are antithetical to the story and the hope of Israel. For Paul, however, nothing could be farther from the truth.

When the Jews mistakenly accused Paul of taking a Gentile into the temple, and attempted to kill him, Paul is rescued and then allowed by the Romans to address the audience. He recounted his former zeal in persecuting the Way (21:4) and then told of his conversion. However, when Paul mentioned his call to go the Gentiles, the audience rose up again, and would have killed him, had the Roman tribune not intervened. The following day, the tribune called the Sanhedrin together for them to investigate the reason why the Jews wanted to kill Paul. It is critical to note that the very first thing that Paul affirms was his faithfulness to the hope of Israel, “With respect to the hope and the resurrection of the dead that I am on trial” (23:6). Contra modern evangelical doctrine, Paul did not see the story of Israel as dead, abolished, replaced or even delayed. Paul’s story was nothing but the hope of Israel.

As Paul stands before the Sanhedrin he affirms his belief in the resurrection as the hope of Israel, found in Moses and the prophets (24:14f). Paul's fidelity to Israel and her eschatological hope must be honored. In addition, we cannot escape notice that while ostensibly agreed with the Pharisees as to the reality of the resurrection, he and they clearly had a different vision and understanding of the resurrection. Notice that in 24:13 he takes note that both he and they affirm resurrection, but, they want to kill him for his views of the resurrection!

Just as Jesus came to proclaim the kingdom, the Jews wanted the kingdom. Jesus came to be king, and the Jews wanted a king. Yet, when the Jews came to make him king and offer him the kingdom, Jesus withdrew (John 6:15)! Patently, different concepts of the nature of the kingdom and kingship were at work, just as in the case of Paul and the Pharisees on the resurrection. Neither Jesus nor Paul preached a message contrary to what the prophets foretold. They both preached "the hope of Israel." Yet, they were both rejected for what they preached and what they offered. This critical fact is seldom explored, but, it is critical for understanding the nature of the hope of Israel. If, as it is generally assumed, Paul had the same concept of the nature of the kingdom and resurrection as did the Pharisees, one can only wonder why they sought to kill him for preaching what they believed. This truth has tremendous implications for our understanding of Paul's eschatology in the epistles.

Paul said he preached nothing but the hope of Israel— Israel after the flesh (Romans 9:1-3)-- and that hope was found nowhere but in Moses, the Law and the Prophets. Notice how often he affirms this in Acts 24-28.

Acts 24:13f— Paul affirmed that his resurrection doctrine was taken directly from the Old Covenant promises to Israel, the promises found in Moses, the Law and the prophets.

Acts 24:21— "It is with respect to the resurrection of the dead that I am on trial."

Acts 25:8 — "Neither against the law of the Jews, nor against the temple, nor against Caesar have I committed any offense."

Acts 26:6 - “And now I stand here on trial because of my hope in the promise made by God to our fathers, to which our twelve tribes hope to attain as they earnestly worship night and day. For this hope am I accused of the Jews.”

Acts 26:22f - “Therefore, having obtained help from God, to this day I stand, witnessing both to small and great, saying no other things than those which the prophets and Moses said would come— 23 that the Christ would suffer, that He would be the first to rise from the dead, and would proclaim light to the Jewish people and to the Gentiles.”

Acts 28:17 - Paul, addressing the leaders of the Jews in Rome, said, “Brothers, though I had no charge to bring against our people, or the customs of our fathers, yet I was delivered as a prisoner from Jerusalem into the hands of the Romans.”

Acts 28:19ff - “I have asked to see you and to speak with you, since it is for the hope of Israel that I am wearing this chain.” v. 23, “From morning to evening he expounded to them, testifying to the kingdom of God, and trying to convince them about Jesus both from the Law of Moses and from the Prophets.” We will come back to Acts 28 in a bit. However, think with me about what it means for Paul to say so many times that his one hope, *his only gospel message*, was nothing but the hope of Israel.

What this means is that when we read Paul’s discourse on the resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15, that we must conform our understanding of that great chapter to Paul’s understanding of God’s Old Testament promises made to Israel after the flesh. It means that we must view 1 Thessalonians and Paul’s promise of the parousia in light of Israel’s promises. It means that we must see the promise of the “redemption of creation” within the context of Israel’s prophecies. And, it means that in Paul’s eschatology, there was not a “Christian eschatology” distinct from Israel and her story.

This is devastating for both the amillennial and postmillennial views, because both of these futurist eschatologies claim that Paul’s view of the last things is fundamentally about the end of the Christian age and the fulfillment of God’s promises to the *church*. This is patently false, since Paul says the resurrection of 1 Corinthians 15 (and thus, 1 Thessalonians 4) would be in fulfillment of Isaiah 25 and Hosea 13. Any theology that divorces Paul’s eschatology from the hope of Israel is, *prima facie*, a false theology.

This is likewise devastating to the dispensational paradigm, since one of the pillars of millennialism is that the promises to Israel are not the promises to the church. But, since Paul says his gospel, his eschatology was nothing but the hope of Israel, this means that there is not a “rapture doctrine” for the church, and then a “Second Coming” eschatology promised to Israel. There was but “one hope” (Ephesians 4:4) and that one hope was found in God’s Old Covenant promises made to Israel after the flesh. So, we say again, that any eschatology divorced from Israel and her promises, to be fulfilled at the consummation of her covenant age, is fundamentally and fatally flawed.

We want now to take another look at the nature of the restoration of Israel as found in Acts.

The Nature of the Restoration of Israel

In Paul’s affirmations that he preached nothing but the hope of Israel, and in Luke’s record of the proclamation of that gospel, we have seen the revolutionary re-shaping and re-identification of the Israel of God. The restoration was a spiritual restoration that eschewed and rejected the geo-political-military restoration of the Davidic kingdom longed for by the Jews. This is evident from Acts 1 to Acts 28. We need to review a bit of this to drive home the point that, first of all, Acts truly is about the restoration of Israel, as foretold in the OT prophets, and secondly, that restoration was not what the Jews of the first century anticipated or desired.

Acts 1 draws directly from Isaiah 43 that predicted the creation of a New Israel, a New Creation and called on Israel to forget the former days.

Acts 2 shows us that Christ was sitting at the right hand of the Father, in fulfillment of YHVH’s promise to raise Messiah to David’s throne. But, Jesus was sitting at the right hand, in the heavenlies, not on a literal throne, in literal Zion.

Acts 3 records Peter’s call to the Jews to repent so that God would grant them a time of rest before the coming judgment. He reminds them of the prophecy of Deuteronomy 18 that God would raise up a prophet like Moses. And, he warns them that to reject Jesus would result in being “utterly cut off out from among the people” (Acts 3:23). This text is all but definitive in

identifying the true Israel: they are the followers of Jesus! Thus, as we noted above, John the Baptizer initiated the “restoration of all things” and Jesus would consummate that restoration at his parousia. But, what cannot be denied is that the restoration begun by John, and thus, the work of Jesus, was not in any way related to the restoration of nationalistic Israel.

Acts 4 shows us that one of the key markers of Israel, the land, was being overtly rejected by the nascent body of Christ. In a radical, unprecedented move, the members of the body of Christ began to sell their land! This was strictly forbidden by Torah. But, they had begun to learn that their salvation was not in the land. They were now— in fulfillment of Isaiah 66— all priests unto the Lord, and even in Torah, God himself was the true inheritance of the priests; they got no inheritance of physical land (Numbers 18:20).

Likewise, Acts 4 shows that the Chief Corner Stone of the long anticipated Messianic Temple had been laid. Thus, Israel was being restored! Yet, the Temple being constructed was a living edifice, built on the living Messiah. And this truth signaled the coming destruction of the Old Temple. Thus, once again, the nature of the restoration of Israel is undeniable. It had nothing whatsoever to do with the old form. It had nothing to do with the old Temple. It had nothing to do with the old City, either.

Acts 6-7 records Stephen in the Temple, recounting Israel’s long history of rejecting God’s plans and purposes, even killing all of His prophets sent to her. Stephen had the “audacity” to even quote Isaiah 66 which spoke of Israel’s inordinate affection for things physical, i.e. the Temple, and calling their attention to the fact that, “God does not dwell in temples made with hands” (Isaiah 66:1). Isaiah 66 not only noted that physical temples were not God’s intended abode, but that the time was coming when the Lord would come against Jerusalem and the old Temple in judgment, to bring in the New People and the New Creation.

All of those students of Torah present that day would have known full well what Stephen was saying in his citation of Isaiah: that wonderful edifice in which he was standing, in which they took so much (too much) pride, was doomed. It was to give way to the New Creation. Acts 8 tells us the story of the restoration of Israel in a profound manner. Israel had been scattered. Samaria was the symbol of that diaspora. Yet now, the gospel of the kingdom— Israel’s hope— was being proclaimed in Samaria! But of course, the message being preached was not one of nationalistic restoration. It had

nothing to do with a re-gathering to the land. It had nothing to do with the beautiful Temple in Jerusalem. It had nothing to do with the destruction of the Romans or the conquering of Israel's national enemies. Nonetheless, Israel was being "gathered." She was being gathered in the very manner that Jesus had desired to gather her (Matthew 23:37)— a covenantal gathering into fellowship with him. The proclamation of the gospel in and to Samaria was a profound fulfillment of the restoration of Israel. But, once again, the unexpected nature and form of the restoration was on full display.

Acts 8 likewise portrays the restoration of Israel in the story of the conversion of the eunuch. In the prophets, the radical nature of the restoration of Israel under Messiah was hinted at, strongly suggested, but, never fully grasped by the Jews. Isaiah had foretold the time- when Israel was restored, and God's temple was present— that even foreigners and the eunuchs would be given a place in that Temple. They would no longer be outsiders, but true children of God! (See Isaiah 60:5-7 where YHVH foretold the time when "the wealth of the nations" would flow to Jerusalem and those who had always been rejected, foreigners, would actually ascend the altar of the Lord to offer sacrifices! This is a stunning "reformulation" of the priesthood, in the manner of Isaiah 66).

In similar stunning fashion, Acts 10-15 records the conversion of the Gentiles and ensuing controversies. What is so stunning is that, although the OT prophets clearly foretold this, Paul's inspired interpretation of those prophecies was that the Gentiles were equal partners, equal partakers of the kingdom blessings (Romans 16:25-26; Ephesians 3:3-11)! Salvation was no longer confined to one ethnic group, but, just as God had called Abraham out from the nations to be His people, God was now calling the nations to be His people! (Cf. Zechariah 2:10). So, "God's people" were being re-identified. "Israel" was no longer identified according to the flesh, but, according to the Spirit by faith.

Acts 15 is extremely powerful proof that God's "Israel" – the kingdom— was now fundamentally different, radically transformed. From Abraham foreword, and under Torah, physical circumcision was one of the key markers of the "children of God." Circumcision was Israel's covenant sign between YHVH and that nation which gave her the right to the land. No circumcision = no land. And yet, the Jerusalem Council determined that Gentiles— as equal partakers of the promises of Israel— were under no obligation to be circumcised.

Keep in mind that no one taught “the hope of Israel” more firmly, more zealously than did Paul, as we have seen. Yet, as he preached that hope of Israel, he vehemently rejected any attempts to impose physical circumcision— or any Israel’s cultus-- on Gentiles (cf. Galatians 2), and openly taught that to impose it on Gentiles resulted in the loss of fellowship with Christ (Galatians 5). What mattered (matters) was not physical circumcision (and thus, not physical land) but the New Creation foretold by the OT prophets (Galatians 6:15-16).

Here is a fine exemplification of what Isaiah 43 foretold. God said He was going to do a “New Thing” in the last days, and called on Israel to forget the past things. And now, here was Paul calling on Israel to forget her past, and look to the New Thing being created in Christ. Stunning indeed! Nothing could have been more revolutionary, more stunning, more offensive to the Jews than this message! This is why Paul called his “circumcision free” gospel an “offense” to the Jews. They realized that the nullification of circumcision was, in fact, the declaration that their right to the land had now been voided! They failed— like so many today—to grasp the spiritual significance of that message. The true “land” that Abraham had longed for, the heavenly Zion— was about to be realized, (Hebrews 11:13-16-12:21f).

Spatial considerations forbid further development of this theme, but, what we have presented powerfully illustrates that Luke and Paul were on the same page. Luke’s narrative was about how God had not abandoned Israel. Paul’s gospel was the same. God was fulfilling His promises to Israel. The problem was that Israel longed for the wrong things— national restoration— when the promises were, from the very beginning, the promise of spiritual restoration.

This brings us to consider that throughout Acts, from beginning to the end, there are powerful suggestions and pointers that indicated that while God was indeed restoring Israel as promised, that found in her Old Covenant promises all along was the reality, as painful and traumatic as it was to be, was that when Israel was restored, the Old Covenant body had to pass away. As when a person has a pecan, and to reach the wonderful “meat” inside, the outer shell has to be crushed, the outer shell of Old Covenant “fleshly” Israel, had to be crushed, having fulfilled her purpose, to reveal the “inner man” of the body of Christ (2 Corinthians 4:16f). This was truly a “good

news / bad news” scenario, but one that is evident throughout Acts, if we have our eyes open. So, look at a few of those earlier references and warnings.

Acts 1– Isaiah 43 – If indeed Isaiah 43 lies behind the beginning of Luke’s narrative, then one can hardly help but notice that the coming of the New Thing that God would do, would necessitate the passing of the Old Creation.

Acts 2:40 – “Save yourselves from this untoward generation.” There are numerous things in Acts 2 that would have been foreboding to the observant.

A.) The outpouring of the Spirit was to be magnified in the last days before the Great And Terrible Day of the Lord. This Great Day was the Day foretold by John the Baptizer, as Elijah, when the wicked would perish (Malachi 4). It would likewise be when the Lord would judge Israel for violation of Torah (Malachi 3:1-6).

B.) Peter was citing Deuteronomy 32 (in Acts 2:40). The Song of Moses was about Israel’s latter end, when the Lord would avenge the blood of his saints in judgment.

C.) Even the marvelous affirmation that Jesus was sitting at the Right Hand of the Majesty in the heavens had a dark lining to the silver cloud. Psalms 110 not only foretold the enthronement of Messiah, it likewise foretold judgment of his enemies (i.e. those who had rejected him!) when he would send forth the rod of his anger.

D.) Very clearly, Peter affirmed that his audience needed to save themselves from what was coming on that generation.

Acts 3:23 - While Peter proclaimed the marvelous fulfillment of God’s promises to Israel, he nonetheless warned them that failure to accept Jesus as Messiah would have dire consequences: “And it shall be that every soul who will not hear that Prophet shall be utterly destroyed from among the people.” It should be noted that the force of the language is very graphic. The destruction of those rejecting Jesus would be utter destruction “out from among the people.” The true “the people” are thus identified as followers of Jesus. Those who refuse to accept him are no longer “the people” and are doomed to be cut of out from among “the people.” This is both stunning and graphic.

Acts 4 - The thrill of hearing that the Chief Corner Stone of the long anticipated Messianic Temple was tempered by the somber reality that those who rejected that Stone were to be, according to the Old Covenant promises– crushed by that Stone. As we have seen, this is precisely how the chief leaders in Jerusalem understood the wonderful message of the gospel. While the gospel truly was “good news” that Israel was being restored as promised, it was “bad news” in that those who had killed him were now doomed to destruction.

Acts 13:40-41 - As Paul proclaimed the fulfillment of God’s promises to Israel, the Jews rejected that message. Consequently, Paul spoke a warning to them: "Beware therefore, lest what has been spoken in the prophets come upon you: ‘Behold, you despisers, Marvel and perish! For I work a work in your days, A work which you will by no means believe, Though one were to declare it to you.’”

Paul was quoting from Habakkuk, where the Lord warned Judea and Jerusalem that failure to obey Him would bring– was just about to bring– judgment. There can be no doubt that Paul’s Jewish audience would have fully realized what the apostle was saying. Failure to obey Christ would be a mistake, resulting in national destruction.

Skipping over some other passages, we return to Acts 28. Luke tells us that as Paul expounded on the hope of Israel and the kingdom, some of the Jews were convinced, but, “others disbelieved” (28:24). And when that unbelief became clear to Paul, he cited a text from Isaiah that Jesus himself had cited Isaiah 6:9f: “Hearing ye shall hear and shall not understand; and seeing you shall see and not perceive; for the heart of this people is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their hearts, and should be converted, and I should heal them. Be it known therefore unto you that the salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles, and that they will hear it.”

We find here an additional echo of what we have seen above: Judgment was about to fall on the Old Covenant Body of Israel for rejecting Messiah and the restoration of Israel taking place in him.

Paul's Roman Mission
Fulfilling the Mystery of God and the World Mission
Awaiting the End

Informed by the Spirit that he was to be imprisoned and taken to Rome, Paul informed the elders of Ephesus of his fate. They were, naturally, deeply disturbed and sorrowful. Yet, Paul told them: "But none of these things move me; nor do I count my life dear to myself, so that I may finish my race with joy, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God" (Acts 20:24)

Paul realized that as Christ's specially chosen apostle, appointed to "fulfill the mystery of God" and to "fill up what is lacking in the sufferings of Christ" (Colossians 1:24f) that he had to suffer, and eventually die. He realized that he had to take the gospel to the "end of the earth" and there complete that task before the Roman authorities.

The eschatological role of Paul is overlooked by many commentators. Yet, Paul clearly saw himself as a covenant mediator (2 Corinthians 3-4), and specially appointed by Christ to bring in the "fullness of the Gentiles" thereby hastening Israel's salvation at the parousia (Romans 11:25f).

For Paul, his imprisonment in Rome and the opportunity to preach the gospel to the ruler of the ancient world constituted the climax and consummation of his task: "At my first defense no one stood with me, but all forsook me. May it not be charged against them. But the Lord stood with me and strengthened me, so that the message might be preached fully through me, and that all the Gentiles might hear" (2 Timothy 4:16f).

Jesus had said that the gospel was to be preached into all the world, as a witness to the nations, then the end would come. And now, at the end of Acts, Paul was about to preach the gospel to the ruler of the nations, fulfilling his task and role as apostle to the Gentiles. Scholars have pondered why Luke ended his history so abruptly. Why quit the record with Paul in Rome, preaching to the Jews and Gentiles alike? Why not record what he said to Nero? Why not record the success or failure of the great apostle?

I suggest that Luke, as well as Paul, considered the task of the world mission as now completed. The end was near. The gospel had been preached to kings and governors, and even once before Nero, evidently. All that remained was

for the judgment suggested by Paul's warning to the Jewish leaders in 28:26 to now come. Thus, the abrupt ending of Acts is best explained by the fact that Luke's purpose in recording the "restoration of Israel" had now been properly recorded. The warnings of the passing of the Old Covenant body were about to come to pass. The New Covenant body of Christ was about to be manifested, vindicated and glorified at the parousia that was now about to take place.