

## TRANSITIONS IN THE BOOK OF ACTS

*Tom's Perspectives*

by Thomas Ice

Virtually all students of the Bible would acknowledge that the Book of Acts is a transition from Israel to the Church, as God's instrument through whom He uses to spread His message. There are three major passages that should be understood in order to properly grasp what this transition is about. Those three passages are Acts 1:3–10; 3:11–26; 15:6–21.

Let me also state up front that the New Testament teaches that the church is a mystery (Rom. 16:25–27; Eph. 3:3–9; Col. 1:26–27), always part of God's plan for history but hidden from man until the Apostle Paul reveals it in some of his writings. Thus, the Church Age is a temporary phase in history in which the gospel is preached, "until the fulness of the Gentiles (i.e., literally "the full number" has come in" (Rom. 11:25). When the Lord's purpose for the church draws to a close, He will rapture His Bride to heaven in order for God to finish His incomplete dealings with Israel during the 70<sup>th</sup> week of Daniel, also known as the seven-year tribulation.

### ACTS 1:3–10

The first transition passage is found in chapter one of Acts before the church began in the next chapter. We are told by Luke, after His resurrection, Jesus repeatedly appeared to His disciples during a forty-day period "speaking of the things concerning the kingdom of God" (1:3). Why did Christ teach them concerning the kingdom when there are so many other things He could have taught them? It appears to me, since these men were all Jewish, and the great hope of the Jewish people is for the Messiah to come and reign with them in a future earthly kingdom, they must have thought because the Messiah was victorious over death it meant the kingdom was at hand. Just such a mentality is reflected in the question they kept asking Jesus repeatedly<sup>1</sup> the day of His ascension. "Lord, is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel" (1:6)? It is clear that they expected the Jewish kingdom that we know as the millennium to come in at this point in history. However, God had other plans.

Jesus' answer to His disciples concerning their repeated question was, "It is not for you to know times or epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority; but you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth" (1:7–8). Notice, Jesus did not rebuke their view of the kingdom as expressed in verse 6, "the kingdom to Israel." Christ did not say they had the wrong view of the kingdom since He was shifting from a literal kingdom with Israel in the center to a spiritual view of the kingdom. Instead, Christ's answer spoke to the timing of the establishment of the kingdom of Israel and turned their focus to the establishment of the impending church age by providing the fifth repetition of the Great Commission.<sup>2</sup>

It should be noted that when the nation of Israel officially rejected Jesus as her Messiah at His first coming in Matthew 12, Jesus follows with the mysteries concerning the kingdom program in Matthew 13. The essence of His teaching in Matthew 13 is that the kingdom will one day arrive, but for now it is being postponed. Christ's answer in Acts 1:8 echoes this teaching. So it is that the Old Testament kingdom of Israel has been postponed in history, but during the interim the Church is called to evangelize the world with the Gospel.

### ACTS 3:11–26

The issue of the postponement of the kingdom is further clarified as the Book of Acts moves into chapter 3. This event appears to have occurred just weeks after the founding of the church in Acts 2. As a result of the circumstances noted in the passage, Peter is preaching a sermon within the Temple Mount area to the Jews and tells them that they need to repent and believe the Gospel. Peter adds the following declarations:

“Repent therefore and return, that your sins may be wiped away, in order that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord; and that He may send Jesus, the Christ appointed for you, whom heaven must receive until the period of restoration of all things about which God spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from ancient time” (3:19–21).

Acts 3 further establishes in the New Testament that there is a future kingdom for Israel, but this passage also clarifies the condition for the coming of the Jewish kingdom. The requirement for the establishment of Israel’s kingdom is that the nation must reverse their rejection of Jesus as their national and individual Messiah (i.e., repent), which will lead to the forgiveness of their sins. Until such repentance takes place, Peter says that Jesus, the Messiah appointed for the nation of Israel must remain in heaven. However, when that condition is met, then the Messiah will return and establish “the period of restoration of all things” and “the times of refreshing,” which are references to the millennial kingdom. Peter says that “the times of refreshing” and “the period of restoration of all things” are also spoken of throughout the Old Testament by the prophets. The noun “restoration” is from the same Greek root that is used in Acts 1 as a verb when the disciples kept asking Jesus if He would at that time “restore” the kingdom to Israel. This provides a clear linkage from chapter 3 to the kingdom in chapter 1.

This passage confirms and also further develops the progress of God’s revelation concerning Israel’s kingdom promises from the Old Testament, which are not being superseded by the establishment of the church. Acts 3 further establishes a future but postponed kingdom for national Israel when they come to faith in the Messiah (Zech. 12:10; Rom. 11:25–27). The tribulation period, which is the 70<sup>th</sup> week of Daniel, will be a future time when Israel will “repent” and “return” to the Lord resulting in removal of their personal sins and national redemption.

### ACTS 15:6–21

The Jerusalem Council is recorded in Acts 15 and provides the context in which our last transition passage occurs. The issue involved is whether Gentiles had to be circumcised and convert to Judaism in order to believe the Gospel, or could they simply believe the Gospel as a Gentile without any relation to Judaism? Such an issue gets right to the heart of God’s purpose for the church age, which began in Acts 2 and its relation to Israel.

James, the half-brother of Jesus and head of the church in Jerusalem, which was the center of early Jewish Christianity, supported the view of Peter, Barnabas, and Paul who taught that Gentiles “are saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, in the same way as they [Jews, TDI] also are” (15:11). James makes the following statement:

Simeon [Peter, TDI] has related how God first concerned Himself about

taking from among the Gentiles a people for His name. And with this the words of the Prophets agree, just as it is written, “AFTER THESE THINGS I will return, AND I WILL REBUILD THE TABERNACLE OF DAVID WHICH HAS FALLEN, AND I WILL REBUILD ITS RUINS, AND I WILL RESTORE IT” (Acts 15:14–16).

James builds his comments around a quotation of Amos 9:11 which speaks of the permanent, last days restoration of the Jewish people to the land of Israel, “and they will not again be rooted out from their land” (Amos 9:15). When we look at Amos 9:11–12, we see that James drops the phrase “in that day,” which begins verse 11 and adds in Acts 15:16a “After these things I will return.” “In that day” in Amos 9:11 orients the fulfillment of when the Lord will rebuild the fallen tabernacle of David, which is within a millennial context (compare Amos 9:13–15). James’ prologue of “after these things I will return” orients the Old Testament quote to the current church age. Clearly “after these things” refers to the period of time that James and his fellow believers were in, which is the church age. James was telling the council, which was primarily Jewish, that after the present church age is complete, then the Lord will “return” and He will fulfill the promises for Israel. This provides a clear outline for history—current church age followed by fulfillment of the Davidic promises to Israel in the millennial kingdom.

#### CONCLUSION

In all three transition passages in Acts the word “restore” is used in some form. That word is key to understanding that God is not finished with Israel and will one day “restore” the kingdom to her. James tells us that the purpose for the current church age is to take out from among the Gentiles a people for his name, which is the church, the Bride of Christ. When the full number of the Gentiles comes in (Rom. 11:25), then God will return and deal with the nation of Israel, leading to her conversion and the arrival of the millennial kingdom. The New Testament does not teach that the church has replaced Israel, instead it reconfirms the teachings of the Old Testament that Israel will enter into her kingdom once she believes and calls for Jesus as her Messiah during the time of Jacob’s trouble (Rom. 10:13–15). Such a Jewish ingathering will lead to even greater Gentile conversions (Rom. 11:12) as Jesus returns to literally reign and rule from Jerusalem through the nation of Israel and with His Bride by His side.

#### ENDNOTES

---

<sup>1</sup> The verb in verse 6, “were asking” is in the imperfect tense: “The action is portrayed as being in progress or as occurring in the *past time*.” Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics—Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1999; 2002), p. 541.

<sup>2</sup> The first four statements of the Great Commission are Matthew 28:16–20; Mark 16:14–18; Luke 24:44–48; and John 20:19–23.