

Lesson Eleven — The Book of Acts

Day One — The Day of Pentecost

Day Two — The Days Following Pentecost

Days Three and Four — Stephen's Message

Day Five — Paul's Ministry

Not only is the Book of Acts a book defining the history of the early Church, it is also a book of transition. The Book of Acts transitions from the Gospels to the Epistles. This week we will peruse sections of this book, striving to understand the transition between the past dispensation and the present dispensation. It is very interesting how the picture is laid out through Divine Inspiration. Literally, the Book of Acts opens a new dispensation.

We have quite a lot of information to work through this week, so please allow for enough study time. This transition book, the Book of Acts, is an important one to understand, especially as you come to the Epistles.

Day One — The Day of Pentecost

With the rejection and crucifixion of Christ by Israel, God, according to His plans from eternity past, changed His mode of operation, so to speak, through a change in His dispensational dealings with man. Jesus had already stated that He was going to withdraw the offer of the kingdom of the heavens away from the Jews, and would extend the offer to a new nation. But as we will see, there was a reoffer made to Israel, through the new nation. In other words, Israel as a whole was being given a second chance, if you will. Only this time, upon Christ's ascension into heaven, it was going to be made through the ministry of this new nation, the Church. Now God was going to use His disciples (sent as Apostles) to give the message of repentance and the kingdom of God to His people, the Jews, for one more period of time. The "keys of the kingdom of the heavens" were given to Peter when he made the statement that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of Living God, to which Jesus responded that upon that rock He would build His Church (Mt. 16:13-19). It would be through this new entity — the Church — that a reoffer of the kingdom would be made to the Jews. This reoffer began on the day of Pentecost, and continued to be made to Israel for about 30 years. The idea of this reoffer can be seen in the parable which Jesus gave to a group of Jewish people who came to Him on one occasion. Read the parable in Luke chapter thirteen.

Luke 13

6 And He began telling this parable: "A certain man had a fig tree which had been planted in his vineyard; and he came looking for fruit on it, and did not find any. 7 And he said to the vineyard-keeper, 'Behold, for three years I have come looking for fruit on this fig

tree without finding any. Cut it down! Why does it even use up the ground?’ 8 And he answered and said to him, ‘Let it alone, sir, for this year too, until I dig around it and put in fertilizer; 9 and if it bears fruit next year, fine; but if not, cut it down.’”

Here a certain man owned a vineyard (a piece of real estate) which had a fig tree planted in it. Of course, the owner of the vineyard expected fruit from the fig tree, but when it produced no fruit after a certain period of time, the owner told the vineyard-keeper to cut it down. For how many years had the fig tree not produced fruit when the command was given to cut it down?

What did the vineyard-keeper ask of the owner?

What was the vineyard-keeper planning on doing to the fig tree for an additional year?

And if the fig tree then produced no fruit, what would be the result for the fig tree?

With this parable, Jesus was prophesying that which was about to take place in Israel. The fig tree represents Israel (Joel 1:6, 7). With the ministry of John the Baptist and the public ministry of Jesus Christ, the call for repentance with an expectation of fruit-bearing had gone forth throughout Israel for a period of *three years*. These three years ended with the crucifixion of Christ. Now the offer of the kingdom was to be withdrawn from Israel, for lack of fruitfulness. But, as we shall see in these opening chapters in Acts, God’s plan for Israel was that a reoffer would be made to Israel, through the ministry of the Church. Then, as seen in the parable of the fruitless fig tree, if Israel did not respond to the offer once again, depicted through the symbolism in this parable, the nation would be set aside, as represented by the fig tree finally being cut down for its continual lack of fruit-bearing.

We will see the symbolism of the work of the vineyard-keeper in this parable play out throughout the first part of the Book of Acts. Let’s get started in this book by reading what happened during the 40 days which followed Christ’s resurrection, and then what happened ten days following His ascension.

As you know, Jesus rose from the dead on the third day and spent forty days ministering to His disciples before He ascended to heaven. Luke, the author of the Book of Acts, briefly mentions Jesus’ post-resurrection ministry preceding his account of the inception of the Church and the things that took place in the early years of the Church. Luke gives a summary of Christ’s post-resurrection ministry in the following verse.

Acts 1

3 To these He also presented Himself alive, after His suffering, by many convincing proofs, appearing to them over a period of forty days, and speaking of the things concerning the kingdom of God.

According to this verse, during the 40 days in which He presented Himself alive to the disciples, what did Jesus speak about?

Exactly prior to His being taken up, Jesus told His disciples to wait for that which had been promised. (Just before His death, Jesus had promised to send the Spirit of Truth, Who would guide them into all Truth [John 16:13-15].) The Spirit came upon the disciples on the day of Pentecost, ten days after Christ's ascension. The disciples began to speak boldly, and a miraculous thing happened. As they spoke, individuals present "out of every nation under heaven" heard them speaking in their own tongues! This caused quite a stir within the city, and Peter stood with the other eleven and gave his first message to the Jews in the re-offer of the kingdom. After quoting the Old Testament prophet Joel (wherein Joel prophesied the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in connection with the coming Day of the Lord [Joel 2:28-32a]), Peter brings to the forefront a few words of King David concerning Jesus Christ. Study this portion of the message. (Remember Jesus had been crucified 50 days prior.)

Acts 2

22 "Men of Israel, listen to these words: Jesus the Nazarene, a man attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through Him in your midst, just as you yourselves know — 23 this Man, delivered up by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death. 24 And God raised Him up again, putting an end to the agony of death, since it was impossible for Him to be held in its power. 25 For David says of Him, 'I WAS ALWAYS BEHOLDING THE LORD IN MY PRESENCE; FOR HE IS AT MY RIGHT HAND, THAT I MAY NOT BE SHAKEN. 26 THEREFORE MY HEART WAS GLAD AND MY TONGUE EXULTED; MOREOVER MY FLESH ALSO WILL ABIDE IN HOPE; 27 BECAUSE THOU WILT NOT ABANDON MY SOUL TO HADES, NOR ALLOW THY HOLY ONE TO UNDERGO DECAY. 28 THOU HAST MADE KNOWN TO ME THE WAYS OF LIFE; THOU WILT MAKE ME FULL OF GLADNESS WITH THY PRESENCE.'

29 "Brethren, I may confidently say to you regarding the patriarch David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. 30 And so, because he was a prophet, and knew that GOD HAD SWORN TO HIM WITH AN OATH TO SEAT one OF HIS DESCENDANTS UPON HIS THRONE, 31 he looked ahead and spoke of the resurrection of the Christ, that HE WAS NEITHER ABANDONED TO HADES, NOR DID His flesh SUFFER DECAY. 32 This Jesus God raised up again, to which we are all witnesses. 33 Therefore having been exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He has poured forth this which you both see and hear. 34 For it was not David who ascended into heaven, but he himself says: 'THE LORD SAID TO MY LORD, SIT AT MY RIGHT HAND, 35 UNTIL I MAKE THINE ENEMIES A FOOTSTOOL FOR THY FEET.' 36 Therefore let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ — this Jesus whom you crucified."

What does Peter say the Israelites did in v. 23?

What is the essence of the quote from David, which Peter quoted (vv. 25-28)?

From what we have learned in prior lessons, what is v. 30 about?

What do vv. 34 and 35 say Jesus' position is now?

The obvious outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon the disciples on the day of Pentecost (and Peter making reference to this outpouring through quoting the prophet Joel at the offset of his message [vv. 16-21]), the words which Peter continued to address the Jews concerning what David had prophesied, and his bold accusation of their having crucified the Messiah (vv. 23b, and 36b), brought about a very intense reaction on the part of some Jews. Read their response.

37 Now when they heard this, they were pierced to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brethren, what shall we do?" 38 And Peter said to them, "Repent, and let each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. 39 For the promise is for you and your children, and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God shall call to Himself." 40 And with many other words he solemnly testified and kept on exhorting them, saying, "Be saved from this perverse generation!"

Before we close for today, take a minute to think through their question in v. 37 and Peter's response, keeping it all in the context of the setting. Jesus had offered the kingdom of the heavens to this group of people, who previously, instead of accepting the King and His offer, had crucified Him. (This offer can only be given to people who are already saved. [Remember how people prior to Christ's death were saved — faith in the death and shed blood of the provision God gave.]) Through the power of the Holy Spirit, Peter gave a message that pierced their hearts. Some of them responded in repentance (repentance being the message John had brought to them three years prior, and the message Jesus had been bringing to them thereafter). The baptism Peter spoke of in v. 38 was the baptism for the forgiveness of their sins, with specific reference in his message to the sin of their having crucified the Messiah. Through repentance and baptism, they would "be saved" (lit. *delivered* [Joel 2:32a; cf. Acts 2:21]) from their own generation of leadership who had perverted the truth about these things. Three thousand souls were saved (delivered) that day!

There you have it — the beginning of the reoffer of the kingdom of the heavens to the Jews. Do you have any thoughts at this point?

Day Two — The Days Following Pentecost

In the days that followed Pentecost, Peter gave more messages along the same lines as the one given on the day of Pentecost. As we read these messages, we can ascertain more clearly the obvious focus and direction of the Spirit's leadership as He continued to speak through Peter.

As we read the next recorded message Peter gave, listen to the tenor of his words. See what he was emphasizing to the people and what their different responses were. In Acts chapter three, Peter and John healed a lame man. This miraculous sign (which was a sign for the nation of Israel, that if they would repent, they too, could be healed as a nation) caused some commotion, and Peter seized the opportunity to give credit where credit was due, bringing forth the accusation of crucifying the Messiah and the message of repentance once again with a view toward healing. Here is what he said to the people.

Acts 3

12 ... “Men of Israel, why do you marvel at this, or why do you gaze at us, as if by our own power or piety we had made him walk? 13 The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified His servant Jesus, the one whom you delivered up, and disowned in the presence of Pilate, when he had decided to release Him. 14 But you disowned the Holy and Righteous One, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, 15 but put to death the Prince of life, the one whom God raised from the dead, a fact to which we are witnesses. 16 And on the basis of faith in His name, it is the name of Jesus which has strengthened this man whom you see and know; and the faith which comes through Him has given him this perfect health in the presence of you all. 17 And now, brethren, I know that you acted in ignorance, just as your rulers did also. 18 But the things which God announced beforehand by the mouth of all the prophets, that His Christ should suffer, He has thus fulfilled. 19 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; 20 and that He may send Jesus, the Christ appointed for you, 21 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. 22 Moses said, ‘**THE LORD GOD SHALL RAISE UP FOR YOU A PROPHET LIKE ME FROM YOUR BRETHREN; TO HIM YOU SHALL GIVE HEED** in everything He says to you. 23 And it shall be that every soul that does not heed that prophet shall be utterly destroyed from among the people.’ 24 And likewise, all the prophets who have spoken, from Samuel and his successors onward, also announced these days. 25 It is you who are the sons of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with your fathers, saying to Abraham, ‘**AND IN YOUR SEED ALL THE FAMILIES OF THE EARTH SHALL BE BLESSED.**’ 26 For you first, God raised up His Servant, and sent Him to bless you by turning every one of you from your wicked ways.”

List all that Peter told the people they had done (vv. 13-15).

What does he tell them to do in v. 19a?

And why does he tell them to do this (v. 19b-21)?

How does Peter then show that Jesus was the One prophesied in the Old Testament?

The result of this message brought 5,000 people to repentance (4:4). It also brought about Peter and John being thrown into jail for the night. The next day the leaders brought the two men into their midst and asked by what power or by what name had they done this miraculous sign. Peter seized the opportunity again. Here is what he said to *the leaders of Israel*.

Acts 4

8 ... “Rulers and elders of the people, 9 if we are on trial today for a benefit done to a sick man, as to how this man has been made well, 10 let it be known to all of you, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead — by this name this man stands here before you in good health. 11 He is the STONE WHICH WAS REJECTED by you, THE BUILDERS, but WHICH BECAME THE VERY CORNER stone. 12 And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men, by which we must be saved.”

Again, what was the accusation brought by Peter against the rulers and elders (v. 10)?

Reread v. 11. Do the words sound familiar to you? Jesus quoted these words the week prior to His death to the leaders after He had given them the parable of the vineyard, at which time He withdrew the offer of the kingdom of the heavens from them (Mt. 21:42).

The leaders feared to do any harm to Peter and John at this point because all the people esteemed them. But they warned Peter and John not to speak in this Name (the Name of Jesus) anymore, to which they replied, “Whether it is right in the sight of God to give heed to you rather than to God, you be the judge; for we cannot stop speaking what we have seen and heard” (4:19b, 20).

The disciples continued to speak out boldly in the Name of Jesus Christ (4:31). And the few fishermen whom Jesus had called three years prior were beginning to turn the world upside down (17:6). Many signs and wonders were taking place among the people; multitudes of men and women were constantly being added to their numbers (5:12, 14). Even a good number of the priests were beginning to believe (Act. 6:7). This brought about great jealousy on the part of the leadership of the Jews, and the apostles were seized and placed in a public jail (5:17, 18). But an angel appeared to them that night, and spoke to them saying, **“Go your way, stand and speak to the people in the temple the whole message of this Life.”** They were miraculously released from prison and they obeyed the words of the angel.

The following day when the leadership sent for the apostles to be brought from the prison in order to be questioned by them, they were told that the prison was locked up tight, but that the prisoners were all gone from the prison, and in fact, they were standing in the temple teaching the people (just as they had been told to do by the angel)! The apostles were brought to the Council and the Council said to them: **“We gave you strict orders not to continue teaching in this name, and behold, you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching, and intend to bring this man’s blood upon us.”**

Now catch what the Council had just said! What did they say that the apostles intended to do?

It is as if they didn’t want to admit to the fact that they were indeed the ones responsible for crucifying Jesus Christ! They were obviously nowhere close to repenting from that sin.

Read Peter's response to them —

Acts 5

29 ..."We must obey God rather than men. **30** The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom you had put to death by hanging Him on a cross. **31** He is the one whom God exalted to His right hand as a Prince and a Savior, to grant repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins. **32** And we are witnesses of these things; and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey Him."

What had the leadership demanded them not to do (Acts 4:19b, 20)?

But what did the angel tell them to do?

Once again, for what actions had the leadership admonished them?

Write out in your own words what Peter said to the Council in Acts 5: 29-32.

Here is the response of the Council —

33 But when they heard this, they were cut to the quick and were intending to slay them.

But Gamaliel, a respected leader of the Jews, strongly urged them to take a wait-and-see posture, cautioning them to proceed slowly just in case their message was indeed from God (5:35-39).

40 And they took his advice; and after calling the apostles in, they flogged them and ordered them to speak no more in the name of Jesus, and then released them.

41 So they [the apostles] went on their way from the presence of the Council, rejoicing that they had been considered worthy to suffer shame for His name. **42** And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they kept right on teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ.

The disciples were doing just as the angel had commanded them to — **"Go your way, stand and speak to the people in the temple the whole message of this Life."** And they continued to turn the world upside down.

There is an interesting pattern of behavior developing here between the obvious message that God desires to be brought to His people and the reaction of the leadership to this message. What is the pattern you see?

Interesting, isn't it?

The next two days of homework are set up so you can divide the study time according to your time frame. There is quite a bit to cover in these two days, so give yourself enough time. See you tomorrow.

Days Three and Four — Stephen's Message

After Pentecost, the basic message of the day was — Repent from crucifying the Messiah, in order that the times of refreshing could come from the presence of the Lord (3:19, 20). The Jews had rejected and crucified their Messiah. Though numerous individuals within the nation did repent, the nation as a whole (led by their leadership) was called upon to repent from that sin, in order for Jesus to return and set up His kingdom. God used Peter, as the major spokesman, during this time throughout Jerusalem to give this message. Though many Jews, including many priests (Acts 6:7), were responding to the message of repentance, we come to a place now where we will see God bringing this message to a climax.

For the next two days we are going to spend time looking at Stephen's message to the Jews. In order to correctly understand the power with which this message went forth, and to correctly understand the effect it had on those who heard the message, we have had to correctly understand what was going on in Jerusalem from the day of Pentecost until this day of Stephen's martyrdom. If we do not correctly understand the events leading up to this day, as well as Peter's messages, Stephen's message might appear to be simply a history lesson. (It is for this reason, we have had the focus on the past two days of homework.)

But it is much, much more than just a lesson to the Jews about their history. The Jews knew what Stephen meant by what he was saying. His words had the potential of either bringing about such a *strong positive response* that it could bring about national repentance, or his words had the potential of bringing about such a *strong negative response* that they would kill him for it. We know the outcome, but let's look at the details of it.

It was obvious that Stephen was a man filled with the Holy Spirit (6:5). His work and ministry for the Lord brought attention to him by both those who were for him and those who were against him. Those who were against him connived to bring him down. He ended up being brought before the Council on false charges, and he used this as an opportunity to give the message of repentance yet another time to the leadership and the people. The first part of his message reminds them of what God had done for Abraham. (As you read through this, try to hear Stephen's words with Jewish ears, so to speak.)

Acts 7

2 And he said, "Hear me, brethren and fathers! The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia, before he lived in Haran, 3 and said to him, 'DEPART FROM YOUR COUNTRY AND YOUR RELATIVES, AND COME INTO THE LAND THAT I WILL SHOW YOU.' 4 Then he departed from the land of the Chaldeans, and settled in Haran. And from there, after his father died, God removed him into this country in which you are now living. 5 And He gave him no inheritance in it, not even a foot of ground; and yet, even when he had no child, He promised that HE WOULD GIVE IT TO HIM AS A POSSESSION, AND TO HIS OFFSPRING AFTER HIM. 6 But God spoke to this effect, that his 'OFFSPRING WOULD BE ALIENS IN A FOREIGN LAND, AND THAT THEY WOULD BE ENSLAVED AND MISTREATED FOR FOUR HUNDRED YEARS. 7 AND WHATEVER NATION TO WHICH THEY SHALL BE IN BONDAGE I MYSELF WILL JUDGE,' said God, 'AND AFTER THAT THEY WILL COME OUT AND SERVE ME IN THIS PLACE.' 8 And He gave him the covenant of circumcision; and so Abraham became the father of Isaac, and circumcised him on the eighth day; and Isaac became the father of Jacob, and Jacob of the twelve patriarchs.

Of what did Stephen remind the leadership? Do you remember the details of what you have previously learned concerning the promises given to Abraham? (The Jews of Stephen's day would have understood exactly what Stephen was saying to them through this reminder.) Write out what you understand Stephen to be saying.

Now Stephen jumps ahead to a time in the history of the Jews where brothers came against a brother due to jealousy of their father's favor upon this one son. Stephen reminds these leaders about the actions of Joseph's brothers and what God brought about as a result. Continuing in Acts 7 —

8b "...and Isaac became the father of Jacob, and Jacob of the twelve patriarchs. 9 And the patriarchs became jealous of Joseph and sold him into Egypt. And yet God was with him, 10 and rescued him from all his afflictions, and granted him favor and wisdom in the sight of Pharaoh, king of Egypt; and he made him governor over Egypt and all his household. 11 Now a famine came over all Egypt and Canaan, and great affliction with it; and our fathers could find no food. 12 But when Jacob heard that there was grain in Egypt, he sent our fathers there the first time. 13 And on the second visit Joseph made himself known to his brothers, and Joseph's family was disclosed to Pharaoh. 14 And Joseph sent word and invited Jacob his father and all his relatives to come to him, seventy-five persons in all. 15 And Jacob went down to Egypt and there passed away, he and our fathers. 16 And from there they were removed to Shechem, and laid in the tomb which Abraham had purchased for a sum of money from the sons of Hamor in Shechem.

Do you remember what the sons of Jacob did to Joseph, their brother? What was it?

Why did they do it (v. 9)?

What all did God do with Joseph? (Remember, Egypt is a picture of the world.)

After Joseph had been mistreated by his brothers, what happened in the land, both in Egypt and Canaan?

With Joseph apart from his brothers, a great famine hit the land, and great affliction with it. God granted Joseph the ability to translate a dream that the Pharaoh had, giving the Pharaoh knowledge of an upcoming famine, resulting in Egypt storing enough grain to cover the years of the famine. But Jacob and his family had no knowledge of the upcoming famine, and therefore suffered the affliction of it. Finally, Jacob sent his sons to Egypt to see if they could buy grain.

The *first time* the brothers were before Joseph, did they recognize him?

What happened on their *second visit*?

Stephen, as directed by the Holy Spirit, points out to the Council that Joseph appeared before them and revealed his identity to his brothers *the second time* (v. 13), and the Jews listening to Stephen would have known that upon the brothers' realization of this, the family of Jacob was well cared for.

Stephen continues with the details of the nation's history, as the Holy Spirit directed him to speak for a specific purpose. He mentions again the promises given to Abraham (v. 17), reminding them that God's plan was unfolding. Continuing —

17 “But as the time of the promise was approaching which God had assured to Abraham, the people increased and multiplied in Egypt, 18 until THERE AROSE ANOTHER KING OVER EGYPT WHO KNEW NOTHING ABOUT JOSEPH. 19 It was he who took shrewd advantage of our race, and mistreated our fathers so that they would expose their infants and they would not survive. 20 And it was at this time that Moses was born; and he was lovely in the sight of God; and he was nurtured three months in his father's home. 21 And after he had been exposed, Pharaoh's daughter took him away, and nurtured him as her own son. 22 And Moses was educated in all the learning of the Egyptians, and he was a man of power in words and deeds. 23 But when he was approaching the age of forty, it entered his mind to visit his brethren, the sons of Israel. 24 And when he saw one of them being treated unjustly, he defended him and took vengeance for the oppressed by striking down the Egyptian. 25 And he supposed that his brethren understood that God was granting them deliverance through him; but they did not understand. 26 And on the following day he appeared to them as they were fighting together, and he tried to reconcile them in peace, saying, ‘Men, you are brethren, why do you injure one another?’ 27 But the one who was injuring his neighbor pushed him away, saying, ‘WHO MADE YOU A RULER AND JUDGE OVER US? 28 YOU DO NOT MEAN TO KILL ME AS YOU KILLED THE EGYPTIAN YESTERDAY, DO YOU?’ 29 And at this remark MOSES FLED, AND BECAME AN ALIEN IN THE LAND OF MIDIAN, where he became the father of two sons.

Stephen points out a time in their history wherein the Jews were under the authority of a harsh ruler — an Egyptian Pharaoh. Stephen brings Moses into the picture, but watch Stephen's comments carefully. He knew that these Jews who were before him thought of themselves as disciples of Moses (John 9:28). And remember, too, what Jesus had told the Jews earlier — “For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me; for he wrote of Me. But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe My words?” (John 5:46, 47).

Stephen points out that Moses supposed that his brethren understood that God was granting them deliverance through him. But what was the case (v. 25b)?

The day after this event took place, Moses came upon two Hebrew brothers who were fighting, and he interrupted them. What was their response to Moses (vv. 27, 28)?

Yes, Stephen points out how their fathers treated Moses, even mockingly asking, “Who made you to be ruler and judge over us?”

(This is interesting! Stephen points out something that happened to Moses, which was very similar to that which had happened to Joseph. Joseph had had a dream and told the dream to his brothers saying, “**Please listen to this dream which I have had; for behold, we were binding sheaves in the field, and lo, my sheaf rose up and also stood erect; and behold, your sheaves gathered around and bowed down to my sheaf.**” Then his brothers said to him, “**Are you actually going to reign over us? Or are you really going to rule over us?**” So they hated him even more for his dreams and for his words (Gen. 37:6-8).)

What is the pattern Stephen is pointing out to the Jews about their history?

Stephen continues —

29b “ ... MOSES FLED, AND BECAME AN ALIEN IN THE LAND OF MIDIAN, where he became the father of two sons. 30 And after forty years had passed, AN ANGEL APPEARED TO HIM IN THE WILDERNESS OF MOUNT Sinai, IN THE FLAME OF A BURNING THORN BUSH. 31 And when Moses saw it, he began to marvel at the sight; and as he approached to look more closely, there came the voice of the Lord: 32 ‘I AM THE GOD OF YOUR FATHERS, THE GOD OF ABRAHAM AND ISAAC AND JACOB.’ And Moses shook with fear and would not venture to look. 33 BUT THE LORD SAID TO HIM, ‘TAKE OFF THE SANDALS FROM YOUR FEET, FOR THE PLACE ON WHICH YOU ARE STANDING IS HOLY GROUND. 34 I HAVE CERTAINLY SEEN THE OPPRESSION OF MY PEOPLE IN EGYPT, AND HAVE HEARD THEIR GROANS, AND I HAVE COME DOWN TO DELIVER THEM; COME NOW, AND I WILL SEND YOU TO EGYPT.’

What did God see and hear in Egypt?

What was God going to do for His people?

As Stephen points out, after these two Hebrew men mocked and rejected Moses, he fled the country. After Moses had departed, the Israelites began being more oppressed than ever and they groaned under the weight of the slavery. God heard their groans and finally sent *the very one who had been rejected* to deliver them. Are you seeing that what Stephen is telling them is more than just a history lesson?

Now watch how many times Stephen points out “this Moses,” or “this man,” or “this is the one” —

35 This Moses whom they disowned, saying, ‘WHO MADE YOU A RULER AND A JUDGE?’ is the one whom God sent to be both a ruler and a deliverer with the help of the angel who appeared to him in the thorn bush. 36 This man led them out, performing wonders and signs in the land of Egypt and in the Red Sea and in the wilderness for forty years. 37 This is the Moses who said to the sons of Israel, ‘GOD SHALL RAISE UP FOR

YOU A PROPHET LIKE ME FROM YOUR BRETHREN.’ 38 This is the one who was in the congregation in the wilderness together with the angel who was speaking to him on Mount Sinai, and who was with our fathers; and he received living oracles to pass on to you.

List the things Stephen reminds the Jews about Moses:

Then Stephen tells them something they already knew —

39 And our fathers were unwilling to be obedient to him, but repudiated him and in their hearts turned back to Egypt, 40 SAYING TO AARON, ‘MAKE FOR US GODS WHO WILL GO BEFORE US; FOR THIS MOSES WHO LED US OUT OF THE LAND OF EGYPT — WE DO NOT KNOW WHAT HAPPENED TO HIM.’ 41 And at that time they made a calf and brought a sacrifice to the idol, and were rejoicing in the works of their hands.

42 “But God turned away and delivered them up to serve the host of heaven; as it is written in the book of the prophets, ‘IT WAS NOT TO ME THAT YOU OFFERED VICTIMS AND SACRIFICES FORTY YEARS IN THE WILDERNESS, WAS IT, O HOUSE OF ISRAEL? 43 YOU ALSO TOOK ALONG THE TABERNACLE OF MOLOCH AND THE STAR OF THE GOD ROMPHA, THE IMAGES WHICH YOU MADE TO WORSHIP THEM. I ALSO WILL REMOVE YOU BEYOND BABYLON.’

What does Stephen remind the Jews that their fathers had done?

As a result, what did God do?

After reminding the Jews of what God did with the generation of Jews who disowned Moses, he reminds them of the following generation, those who were taken into the land by Joshua —

44 Our fathers had the tabernacle of testimony in the wilderness, just as He who spoke to Moses directed him to make it according to the pattern which he had seen. 45 And having received it in their turn, our fathers [the second generation] brought it in with Joshua upon dispossessing the nations whom God drove out before our fathers, until the time of David.

What did God do for the second generation through Joshua?

Then Stephen mentions King David, drawing attention to *regal* issues surrounding Israel. Again this is with a purpose!

Continuing —

46 And David found favor in God's sight, and asked that he might find a dwelling place for the God of Jacob. 47 But it was Solomon who built a house for Him. 48 However, the Most High does not dwell in houses made by human hands; as the prophet says: 49 'HEAVEN IS MY THRONE, AND EARTH IS THE FOOTSTOOL OF MY FEET; WHAT KIND OF HOUSE WILL YOU BUILD FOR ME?' says the Lord; 'OR WHAT PLACE IS THERE FOR MY REPOSE? 50 WAS IT NOT MY HAND WHICH MADE ALL THESE THINGS?'

Any knowledgeable Jew would have been immediately mindful of God's dealings with David, especially the promises made to David in II Samuel chapter seven concerning one of his descendants Who would sit on his throne, and Whose kingdom would be an everlasting kingdom.

Look at the first half of v. 49. What two realms does Stephen mention here, quoting from the prophet, Isaiah?

Now look at the last half of v. 49. What is the question God asks?

(The word for *repose* (v. 49) is the same word for *rest* [see also Isa. 66:1]. Do you remember in Genesis 2:1-3, that God rested on the seventh day and set aside the seventh day [the day of rest] as holy? Later, God gave the Sabbath day as a sign for the Jews, something to which they are to look forward. Even now there is a Sabbath rest yet future for the people of God [Heb. 4:9]. It is a day set aside, a day of rest, a sabbath rest. We'll study more on that in upcoming weeks.)

Remembering that Jesus offered the heavenly realm of the kingdom to the Jews, what is the implication in what Stephen says in vv. 48 and 49?

This is the climax of the historical portion of Stephen's message, ending with the mention of the dual realms of the kingdom. This would certainly have reminded the Jews of the message which they had rejected and in the process of rejecting the message, they killed the Messenger. All the parts leading up to this part of Stephen's message, along with the reminder of the dual realm of God's throne would have served to remind the Jews of the message Jesus had brought to them — "Repent, for *the kingdom of the heavens* is at hand."

Look closely at all the elements of Stephen's "history lesson" for the Jews. First Stephen mentions the call of Abraham and the promises God gave to him — promises that include a land (v. 3), an inheritance (v. 5), and descendants (vv. 5b, 6). Then he reminds them of Joseph, the favored son, who had been rejected by his brothers, sold into slavery and later elevated to the second highest position in all of Egypt, pointing out to them that trouble came upon them after they sold Joseph — a severe famine in the land. Then he mentions the fact that in the first visit, the brothers didn't recognize their brother, Joseph, but upon their *second visit* with Joseph, his identity is revealed to them, and they are blessed through him.

Then Stephen gives a fairly lengthy account of Moses and how their fathers had repudiated Moses, the one who "was lovely in the sight of God" and chosen by Him to lead the Children of Israel out of bondage.

This same Moses is the one their fathers had disowned and disobeyed, and as a result, their fathers had been laid low in the wilderness. Then he mentions *regality*, bringing King David into the forefront. It is at this point that Stephen packs the final punch. All of these historical reminders has a purpose in view — bringing the nation to repentance for crucifying the Messiah, *the very One to Whom all these pictures point!* Stephen says —

51 “You men who are stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears are always resisting the Holy Spirit; you are doing just as your fathers did. 52 Which one of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who had previously announced the coming of the Righteous One, whose betrayers and murderers you have now become; 53 you who received the law as ordained by angels, and yet did not keep it.”

Stephen draws a comparison between what their fathers had done, and what they had done. Put into your own words what the comparison is.

This message, given by Stephen, was under the specific guidance and direction of the Holy Spirit (v. 55). It was a powerful message, designed to bring about recognition and repentance on the part of those listening to it. The nation of Israel, as directed by their leadership, needed to repent from their rebellious, sinful ways (particularly that of rejecting and crucifying the Messiah) so that the Messiah could usher in His kingdom, and bring about the blessings connected with the promises given to Abraham. In particular, they needed to repent from rejecting and crucifying the Messiah. *And if the leadership would lead Israel in national repentance for their sin*, then Jesus, the Holy and Righteous One, would come a *second time* (they had rejected Him the first time), bringing in the period of restoration and times of refreshing from the presence of the Lord, restoring the kingdom to Israel (3:19-21; cf. 1:6).

What would be the leadership’s response to this powerful message?

54 Now when they heard this, they were cut to the quick, and they began gnashing their teeth at him.

Apparently, so ready was the Father to send Jesus back (upon their repentance) that Stephen was allowed to witness something taking place in the heavens. He was allowed witness Jesus standing, as if ready to return.

55 But being full of the Holy Spirit, he gazed intently into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God; 56 and he said, “Behold, I see the heavens opened up and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.”

What position is Jesus in at this moment?

Prior to Stephen seeing Jesus standing, it had already been mentioned by Peter on the day of Pentecost that Jesus *had taken His seat* at the right hand of the Father, which would be His position until the Father sends Him back, at which time His enemies would be made a footstool for His feet (Mk. 16:19; Acts 2:34, 35). And now Stephen looks into heaven and sees the glory of God and sees *Jesus standing!* What an awesome

sight! What an awesome thought! Standing, ready to be sent back a second time, if the leadership responded in repentance to this Spirit-directed message. What would be their response?

57 But they cried out with a loud voice, and covered their ears, and they rushed upon him with one impulse. 58 And when they had driven him out of the city, they began stoning him, and the witnesses laid aside their robes at the feet of a young man named Saul. 59 And they went on stoning Stephen as he called upon the Lord and said, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!” 60 And falling on his knees, he cried out with a loud voice, “Lord, do not hold this sin against them!” And having said this, he fell asleep.

The heavens closed up and, evidently, Jesus took His seat once again at the right hand of the Father, and is presently waiting (Ps. 110:1)! It is important to see that this is a major turning point in the New Testament. Of course this event did not catch God by surprise. A way had to be made for the Gentiles to be grafted in. We will see the beginning of this course tomorrow as well as throughout the remainder of this workbook.

You are doing great! Keep up the good work!

Day Five — Paul’s Ministry

With the martyrdom of Stephen, it had become clear that the nation of Israel, as a whole — led by the Pharisees, Chief Priests and Sadducees — was not going to repent. Through the messages given to them by both Peter and Stephen, they had had several opportunities to do so; but the rejection at the conclusion of Stephen’s message seems to be somewhat of a climactic rejection, bringing about a change in direction in the Book of Acts. God had prepared a way for the Gentiles to be grafted into the family of Abraham, and this was going to come to the forefront now.

The preponderance of the remainder of this Bible study will be made of that which follows the event that took place in Acts chapter seven.

There is a person who now comes to the forefront. Did you notice toward the end of the Acts chapter seven a man named Saul was mentioned (v. 58)? Saul (his Hebrew name), better known as Paul (his Greek name), was zealous for his Hebrew tradition. He had been “circumcised the eighth day, was of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the Law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to the righteousness which is in the Law, found blameless” (Phil. 3:5, 6). But something happened to him one day subsequent to Stephen’s death that changed the direction of his whole life and he was never the same again.

After Stephen’s martyrdom, many Jews who had become followers of Christ fled from Jerusalem into the neighboring cities and countryside. Paul was going into these different cities in order to bring these Christians back to Jerusalem to be punished. It was on one of these trips that the Lord appeared to him, striking him blind. A dialogue ensued between Paul and the Lord Jesus Christ which forever changed him.

Paul was converted on that day (Acts 9:3-6), that is to say that Paul changed his mind about Jesus Christ. His blindness remained for three days; but as soon as his sight was restored, he immediately and boldly began proclaiming in the synagogues that Jesus was the Son of God (9:20). (Remember what that title means!)

Subsequently, Paul spent as many as three years in the Arabian desert, being divinely taught the revelation of Jesus Christ, by Jesus Himself, and was shown that he was to take the message of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles (Gal. 1:11-18).

In short, God raised up Paul to take the Gospel into the whole world. In the years that followed, Paul made three different journeys into different parts of the known world, establishing the Church in the various areas. Upon arriving in a particular city, he would first go to the synagogue and speak to the Jews about Jesus Christ. When that fellowship of Jews rejected the message (which they did time after time), he then went into the streets and by-ways of that area, giving the message to the Gentiles.

He brought a two-fold message to the Gentiles. First, he brought the *gospel of the grace of God* to the unsaved people, giving them the good news concerning the death and shed blood of Jesus, and the fact that, through faith in Jesus, they could be saved from their sins (e.g. Acts 16:30, 31). He also brought the *gospel of the glories of Christ* to saved people, giving them the good news concerning their salvation, and instructing them that they have been saved for a purpose, telling them what that purpose is. In the end, he gave the *complete* message, strongly establishing the Church in the Word of God. This is exemplified in what Paul told the elders of Ephesus at Miletus after his third journey, having spent three years ministering to the people in Asia —

Acts 20

18 “You yourselves know, from the first day that I set foot in Asia, how I was with you the whole time, 19 serving the Lord with all humility and with tears and with trials which came upon me through the plots of the Jews; 20 how I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you publicly and from house to house, 21 solemnly testifying to both Jews and Greeks of repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.

...24 “But I do not consider my life of any account as dear to myself, in order that I may finish my course, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify solemnly of the gospel of the grace of God. 25 And now, behold, I know that all of you, among whom I went about preaching the kingdom, will see my face no more. 26 Therefore I testify to you this day, that I am innocent of the blood of all men. 27 For I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole purpose of God.

According to what Paul says in vv. 24 and 25, what would make up *the whole purpose of God*?

As Paul continued to travel from city to city, he continued to go first to the synagogues before going to the Gentiles. But time after time the Jews rejected him and plotted against him. He suffered many things at the hands of his foes, Jews and Gentiles alike.

Several different times, Paul verbalized a judgment against the Jews. The first was in Antioch, a city in the region of Pisidian (not Syria). Paul gave a message to the Jews, which, interestingly enough, was actually very similar to the message which he had heard Stephen give just prior to Stephen’s stoning. (You can read what Paul said to the Jews of this city in Acts 13:16-41.) His message ended with this warning —

Acts 13

38 “Therefore let it be known to you, brethren, that through Him forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you, 39 and through Him everyone who believes is freed from all things, from which you could not be freed through the Law of Moses. 40 Take heed therefore, so that the thing spoken of in the Prophets may not come upon you: 41 ‘BEHOLD, YOU SCOFFERS, AND MARVEL, AND PERISH; FOR I AM ACCOMPLISHING A WORK IN YOUR DAYS, A WORK WHICH YOU WILL NEVER BELIEVE, THOUGH SOMEONE SHOULD DESCRIBE IT TO YOU.’”

The following week, a great number of Jews came to hear Paul speak to them in the synagogue. The Jewish leaders of the city became jealous and began contradicting the things Paul said (v. 45). But Paul was not deterred and spoke these condemning words —

Acts 13

46 And Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly and said, “It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken to you first; since you repudiate it, and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal¹ life, behold, we are turning to the Gentiles. 47 For thus the Lord has commanded us, ‘I HAVE PLACED YOU AS A LIGHT FOR THE GENTILES, THAT YOU SHOULD BRING SALVATION TO THE END OF THE EARTH.’”

48 And when the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord; and as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed. 49 And the word of the Lord was being spread through the whole region.

Another time Paul brought a verbal judgment against the Jews, explaining that he would take this message to the Gentiles, was when he was in Corinth, where he ended up spending a year and a half. Upon his arrival in Corinth, the Scripture says that Paul spent every Sabbath in the synagogue trying to persuade both Jews and Greeks concerning Jesus Christ.

Acts 18

... 6 And when they [the Jews] resisted and blasphemed, he shook out his garments and said to them, “Your blood be upon your own heads! I am clean. From now on I shall go to the Gentiles.”

This, along with a similar statement Paul made in 20:26, is probably a direct reference to a passage in Ezekiel chapter three —

Ezekiel 3

17 “Son of man, I have appointed you a watchman to the house of Israel; whenever you hear a word from My mouth, warn them from Me. 18 When I say to the wicked, ‘You shall surely die’; and you do not warn him or speak out to warn the wicked from his wicked way that he may live, that wicked man shall die in his iniquity, but his blood I will require at your hand. 19 Yet if you have warned the wicked, and he does not turn from his wickedness or from his wicked way, he shall die in his iniquity; but you have delivered yourself.

Paul had fulfilled his responsibility before the Lord in warning his brethren!

Shortly after this incident in Corinth, at the beginning of his stay there, the Lord spoke to Paul in a night vision saying, **“Do not be afraid any longer, but go on speaking and do not be silent; for I am with you, and no man will attack you in order to harm you, for I have many people in this city”** (18:9, 10).

Paul had many more travels and many more converts. Along the way, he brought the light of the Gospel to the Gentiles across the known world. The Book of Acts closes with the Jews imprisoning Paul in Jerusalem and his asking to go to Rome, having appealed to Caesar. While in Rome, Paul called together the leading men of the Jews. When he had them together, he basically explained the essence of his ministry (see Acts 28:16ff), ultimately expounding the kingdom to them (v. 23). Read carefully this last passage from the Book of Acts, looking to see his emphasis on the coming kingdom of Jesus Christ.

¹ Be sure to understand the word “eternal” <166> in this context. It is the Greek word *aionios*. Look it up in the appendix and keep it in context for proper interpretation of its use within the text.

Acts 28

24 And some were being persuaded by the things spoken, but others would not believe. **25** And when they did not agree with one another, they began leaving after Paul had spoken one parting word, “The Holy Spirit rightly spoke through Isaiah the prophet to your fathers, **26** saying, ‘GO TO THIS PEOPLE AND SAY, “YOU WILL KEEP ON HEARING, BUT WILL NOT UNDERSTAND; AND YOU WILL KEEP ON SEEING, BUT WILL NOT PERCEIVE; **27** FOR THE HEART OF THIS PEOPLE HAS BECOME DULL, AND WITH THEIR EARS THEY SCARCELY HEAR, AND THEY HAVE CLOSED THEIR EYES; LEST THEY SHOULD SEE WITH THEIR EYES, AND HEAR WITH THEIR EARS, AND UNDERSTAND WITH THEIR HEART AND RETURN, AND I SHOULD HEAL THEM.”’ **28** Let it be known to you therefore, that this salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles; they will also listen.” **29** And when he had spoken these words, the Jews departed, having a great dispute among themselves.

30 And he stayed two full years in his own rented quarters, and was welcoming all who came to him, **31** preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching concerning the Lord Jesus Christ with all openness, unhindered.

Did you notice that last verse? And he preached *the kingdom of God* and taught things *concerning the Lord Jesus Christ with all openness, unhindered!*

The prayer which he asked the Church at Ephesus to pray for him was being answered —

Ephesians 6

19 and pray on my behalf, that utterance may be given to me in the opening of my mouth, to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel, **20** for which I am an ambassador in chains; that in proclaiming it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak.

In conclusion, the Book of Acts is the historical account of the transition made between the offer of the kingdom of the heavens to the Jews through the ministry of John the Baptist, Jesus and His disciples (in the gospels) to the reoffer being made to the Jews through the ministry of the newly formed Church, with the offer eventually being completely withdrawn from the nation of Israel and their being completely set aside (in the Book of Acts). With the continual rejection on the part of Israel as a whole, Israel was set aside. The remainder of the New Testament, the epistles, is given over to the offer of the kingdom of the heavens being made to the Church, the *ekklesia*, with the Book of the Revelation culminating all things.

With these things in mind, it is through carefully studying the epistles, that those *who have been called* can come into a detailed understanding of *the purpose of their calling*. Study these next lessons well! They can be of a great benefit to you.

See you in class!