

Sunday May 24th 2015
God Gave His Word – a Transition from Gospels to the Epistles
A Brief Overview
(Part 1 of 3)

**Matthew 7:13 “Enter by the narrow gate;
for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction,
and there are many who go in by it.
14 Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life,
and there are few who find it.**

.... 21 Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven,
but he who does the will of My Father in heaven.
22 Many will say to Me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord,
have we not prophesied in Your name,
cast out demons in Your name, and
done many wonders in Your name?’
23 And then I will declare to them,
‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!’

Matthew 22:14 “For many are called, but few are chosen.”

In both of these Scriptural texts we see a simple comparison between *the many* and *the few*. Jesus is speaking to His people about the one thing that is absolutely pervasive in God’s Word, and yet astoundingly, so *few* know what it is! And as a result of this lack of knowledge *many* will find themselves on the broad path leading to destruction ó the path that leads to the loss of the one thing to which they had been called, that of entering the kingdom of the heavens. In fact, so nominal is the understanding of most concerning these things that on the Day of Judgment, *many* will say to Jesus, ‘Lord, Lord, have we notí ?’ And yet He will say to them (with respect to entering the kingdom) ‘I never knew you; depart from meí !’ And so we see that while *many are called*, only *a few will be chosen* (or ‘called out’).

So what distinguishes a person from being on the narrow path as opposed to the broad one? And how can a person *know* that they are doing the will of the Father rather than practicing lawlessness?

The answers to these questions are derived from a *careful* and *diligent* study of *the way in which God lays out His Word* ó not just a cursory study of God’s Word, but a careful and diligent study of *the way* in which God gave it. **Isaiah 28:10 For precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept, Line upon line, line upon line, Here a little, there a little.”** There is no precept in God’s Word that exists in a vacuum; His precepts are not independent of each other; each one fits *precisely* into His overall message. Therefore, each one must be understood as part of the whole, fitting properly into its place, one built upon another. For example, the miraculous sign gifts mentioned in our opening text must fit *precisely* in God’s Word ó *in the way in which He laid it out*, and not in used in an *illegal* way (which is the way those practicing lawlessness had been using them).

A person cannot just jump into a part of Scripture and pull text out of its context, giving it the meaning that they want it to have. Many people use Scripture in this way, but in doing so they run the risk of falling into the group of the *many* who will hear those devastating words from the Lord at Judgment ó *“Depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.”* No! We must be careful *to use* God’s Word correctly; to *understand* it as He gave it, in order to line up our lives correctly with it! It just can’t be a *“willy-nilly”* approach to the Word. We must give our due diligence to learn *how* God wants us to understand it, especially knowing what is at stake here! In a real sense, it really is a matter of life or death!

So the facet of understanding Scripture correctly which we will be contemplating in these three messages involves the specifics on *the transition between the gospels to the epistles*, a transition found in the Book of Acts. And it is important for us to understand this transition as it will clarify what might otherwise be confusing in some of the epistles. There have been *many* who have not understood this very important transition, and in their lack of understanding have worked lawlessness, even thinking they are doing specific miraculous works *in His Name*, but in the end, will find themselves suffering great loss for it!

But before we jump into the Book of Acts and then on into the epistles, it might be good to do a brief review of how the OT leads into the four gospels. This will be very basic, but for contextual purposes, please bear with me for the better part of this message, as it will be important to grasp how God *begins* and then *continues*, before we consider the transition.

(Most of you will be familiar with what is taught in this message and may wonder why we are going over it again. But there are several specifics that we will need to make sure are in place as we come to Acts and the Epistles. So if you don’t mind, we’ll first consider)

The Old Testament

The Book of Genesis ó The Book of Beginnings ó gives us essential *historical details* about the first 2500 years of mankind’s history. The *exact* historical details, inspired by the Holy Spirit, were recorded for *very* specific reasons. The details given about the lives and events of those in Genesis lay out the foundation of His complete Word. It is upon this foundation that the remainder of God’s Word is built. **Psalms 11:3** [asks] **If the foundations are destroyed, What can the righteous do?** If incorrect foundations are laid, they could do nothing but misunderstand God’s Word! But if a person lays the correct Scriptural foundation in his understanding of God’s Word, then he can begin to understand the whole of Scripture correctly.

From Adam to Enoch to Noah to Abraham to Isaac to Jacob and to Jacob’s twelve sons (who make up the twelve tribes of Israel), we can see the all-important flow of historical details during man’s initial 2500 years. Once Abraham comes onto the scene (Gen. 12), the ensuing historical facts have to do with the ancestral lineage of the Jewish people. Herein is where the promises of God are made to His people through Abraham, promises which were reiterated to Isaac then Jacob. The Book of Genesis closes with the death of Joseph and his unburied coffin.

Then the subsequent four books that Moses wrote (Exodus ó Deuteronomy) depict the history of Israel's slavery, their exodus out of Egypt, the first giving of the law (to the first generation coming out of Egypt), the actions of the Israelites in the wilderness, the second giving of the law (to the second generation 40 years later), and finally Moses's death. Here, *all* attention is given to details concerning Israel and her relationship with God and the nations that surround them. The focus in these five books (past Genesis chapter twelve) is *completely upon Israel*. God speaks to His people and His people alone in these books, and not to any of the unbelieving, unsaved nations around them. (Of course, subsequently, we ó the Church (God's people), can learn very much from these things as well.

Then beyond the writings of Moses, we see *God* speaking to His people through

- The Book of Joshua, as he led the second generation of the Children of Israel into the Promised Land;
- The Book of the Judges, during the ensuing 450 years or so of the Jewish people after Joshua's day, revealing how *every man did what was right in his own eyes, because there was no king in Israel*, and how God dealt with His people in their rebellion;
- The books of Ruth through Esther revealing the various aspects of God dealing directly with His people, their actions toward Him, and His reactions to their actions.

All of these books and all the inspired details given within each are given for purposes far beyond simply supplying historical facts. While these facts are truly historical, more importantly *each and every* detail inspired by God is given within the framework of the *type/antitype structure* of God's Word. In other words, the inspired record of Biblical history lays out ó through the use of *types* ó prophetic detail which God wants His people to understand and which are fulfilled in their *antitypes*. This is the very means by which God uses to teach His people His plans and purposes for saved mankind. And even before one gets to the Books of the Prophets, or the Book of Revelation, these history books have already laid out the foundation for all of prophecy!

Then God continues to speak *to His people* through

- The Books of Wisdom ó Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Songs ó given to God's people for the purpose of their learning to walk more closely and correctly with Him, while He teaches through the various writings.
(Even portions of these books fills in more details of prophecy concerning God's plans. We can see this through what Jesus said to a large group of disciples on Resurrection Day, saying: **Luke 24: 44...** **“These are the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning Me.”** His referring to the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms is simply one way of describing the entire OT.)

And finally, God speaks to His people through

- The Books of the Prophets ó Isaiah to Malachi ó each prophet bringing His message of His past and future dealings with them; each replete with warnings concerning blessings for obedience and curses for disobedience, all with a view to the end.

Then at the end of what we call the Old Testament (as we'll see in a moment), the very *last* thing God said to His people Israel through Malachi is the very *first* thing He spoke to His people Israel, even 400 years later. The very last passage in the OT is: **Malachi 4:5 Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet Before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD. 6 And he will turn The hearts of the fathers to the children, And the hearts of the children to their fathers, Lest I come and strike the earth with a curse.**" This was the final thing God spoke through any prophet to Israel for approximately 400 years. In one sense, it is at this point that the whole of God's Word *is complete*. The whole of the OT encapsulates all that God needs to say to His people, because once He picks up where He left off, *the Word became flesh*.

Beyond the last passage in the OT, when we get into the NT, God only draws from all that He had previously spoken and expounds upon it. Nothing more needed to be added, it only needed to either be more fully explained, or fulfilled. There is nothing in the New Testament that is not first presented in the Old in some way or fashion. Not one thing! And so the question is: How can a person even *begin* to understand the New Testament apart from a good and correct understanding of the Old? Answer is: They cannot. The New is simply an unfolding of the Old. And this fact cannot be overstated!

The New Testament

So as we approach what we have come to call the New Testament, we would only expect that God would continue where He left off; we would only expect that He would speak *to* Israel, and not to another. In other words, we would really have to see the four gospels simply as a continuation of where He had left off 400 years prior, and see Him speaking again to Israel. And that is exactly what we do see!

The Message of the Gospels

After the 400 years, God sent the Angel Gabriel to appear to a specific priest as he was ministering in the temple one day. His name was Zacharias. The Angel told Zacharias that he and his wife, Elizabeth, would have a son (even in their old age), and that this son would be the one who would go before the Lord as His forerunner *in the spirit and power of Elijah*. The angel, speaking of their son, said: **Luke 1:16 "And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God. 17 He will also go before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, 'to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children,' and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord."** Amazingly (but not surprisingly) God picked up *exactly* where He left off, repeating exactly what He had told Malachi! And wouldn't that just be so? God's immutability must certainly be seen in this. He *remembered* the very last thing He had spoken through Malachi and repeated it. And much more so would this be emphasized through the specific person to whom God sent the angel. It is no coincidence that the message concerning the child *who was to come in the spirit of Elijah* in order to prepare the way for the beginning of the fulfillment of the OT writings was given to a man whose name was *Zacharias* (a name which means *God Remembers*); who was married to *Elizabeth* (a name which means *God of the Oath*). And still even *more* amazingly, the Angel specifically told Zacharias that he would name his son *John* (a name which means *the grace or mercy of the Lord*). So right here, encapsulated within this small family in Israel, God was revealing to His people 400 years after He last spoke through a prophet that He *remembered* the *oath* that He had sworn to Abraham, and in His **grace and mercy**, He was preparing to fulfill the promises. This, of course, is speaking of the birth of John the Baptist.

And so we see that the New is simply a *continuation* of the Old, and not a separate work! This idea is even more valid when one realizes that the Old Covenant ó the covenant made on Mt. Sinai in Moses' day ó was still fully in force during most of the time covered in the gospels, even up until the moment Christ died. It was only in the death of Christ that the Old Covenant was made ineffective and the New Covenant was inaugurated, which was the plan of God all along. The Old was always to be replaced by the New.

And while *many* Christians tend to think of the gospels as being solely related to the Church, not even giving a thought to Israel, a correct study of these four books of Scripture would reveal this is not the way to look at it. In fact, by looking at the gospels from that perspective one would have an incorrect understanding of the gospel, which would lead to an incorrect understanding of the Book of Acts, which would naturally lead to an incorrect understanding of the epistles. And there you have the *many* at the JSOC who find themselves having traversed the broad path that leads to destruction! This could be a dismal picture!

Can we see then why it is so important to have a correct understanding of the Old Testament, in order to have a correct understanding of all that follows in the New? The gospels are very Jewish in nature. Each was written by a Jewish man, about a Jewish Messiah, Who was born the King of the Jews, Who lived and ministered to and around Israel, and Who died at the hands of Israel. And so, it becomes clear that within these first four NT books, Jesus' *focus* had to be on Israel (and yet in a sense, His *thoughts* also had to be on the Church that He would yet build).

In order to fulfill OT prophecy, two things will have had to have been in place:

1. Israel would have to repent and accept the Messiah as their King, and
2. Israel would have to reject the message of repentance and crucify their Messiah.

Though this sounds like the two things are diametrically opposed, one to the other, it is true that both of these things would have to be in place prior to the Kingdom of Christ being set up. And in order for either of these events to happen, the message of the gospels ó the offer of the kingdom (encapsulating the promises made to Abraham and to his descendants) ó had to run its course *within Israel* first, apart from Gentiles. Which it did!

Additionally, since those making up the Nation of Israel were the *only* descendants of Abraham, through Isaac and Jacob at the time of Christ's first coming, they were the only ones to whom the offer of the kingdom could be made! Israel ó as a Nation ó had to be offered the prophesied kingdom in order for them to reject the offer, crucify their Messiah, and be set aside for a time, so that the prophecies concerning the Gentiles could be fulfilled ó Gentiles who would become spiritual descendants of Abraham through his Seed ó Jesus Christ (Gal. 3:16, 29). It was all a part of God's plan, as we know that Gentiles being grafted in, was prophesied in the Old Testament. One place this can be seen in **Isaiah 9:2 The people who walked in darkness Have seen a great light; Those who dwelt in the land of the shadow of death, Upon them a light has shined.** And then, even at the opening of the NT, we see a man named Simeon in the Temple when Mary and Joseph brought Baby Jesus in to be circumcised on the 8th day, and at the sight of the Baby Jesus, Simeon quoted from Isaiah: **Luke 2:29 "Lord, now You are letting Your servant depart in peace, According to Your word; 30 For my eyes have seen Your salvation 31 Which You**

have prepared before the face of all peoples, 32 A light to bring revelation to the Gentiles, And the glory of Your people Israel.”

Of course, this is not only place in the gospels where the Church is alluded to! We will remember that *Jesus left the house and sat by the seaside* in Matthew 13 as He began speaking to the crowds of Israel in parables. We know that the *house* alludes to Israel and *the seaside* alludes to Gentiles, indicating that there would come a point when God would set Israel aside *for a time* in order to deal with Gentiles. So much can be learned about the Church from these parables. Also in Matthew 16, Jesus told the disciples explicitly that He would *build His Church!* Christians certainly *can* learn about the Church from the gospels, as they can learn also learn some about the Church in the Old Testament, even though the Church didn't come into existence until Acts chapter two.

But then even with the setting aside of Israel for a 2,000-year period, God is not finished with Israel yet. Paul explained this to the Church at Rome: **Romans 10:16 But they [speaking of Israel] have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, “Lord, who has believed our report?” 17 So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God. 18 But I say, have they not heard? Yes indeed: “Their sound has gone out to all the earth, And their words to the ends of the world.” 19 But I say, did Israel not know? First Moses says: “I will provoke you to jealousy by those who are not a nation, I will move you to anger by a foolish nation.” 20 But Isaiah is very bold and says: “I was found by those who did not seek Me; I was made manifest to those who did not ask for Me.” 21 But to Israel he says: “All day long I have stretched out My hands To a disobedient and contrary people.”** Here Paul is quoting OT Prophets, revealing that the very thing that was prophesied had come to pass in the first coming of Christ with respect to the Jews and their rejecting Jesus. This had to be the case, in order for God to be able to bring the LIGHT to the Gentiles.

Paul goes on to explain further in **Romans 11:8 Just as it is written: “God has given them [speaking of Israel] a spirit of stupor, Eyes that they should not see And ears that they should not hear, To this very day.” 11 I say then, have they stumbled that they should fall? Certainly not! But through their fall, to provoke them to jealousy, salvation has come to the Gentiles.** Here we see that it is through their rejection of the offer and their crucifying their Messiah that Gentiles are brought into the picture. So through this rejection, we can receive the blessings and promises of Abraham. But again, we must keep in mind that God is not finished with Israel: **Romans 11:25 For I do not desire, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery, lest you should be wise in your own opinion, that blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. 26 And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: “The Deliverer will come out of Zion, And He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob; 27 For this is My covenant with them, When I take away their sins.” 28 Concerning the gospel they are enemies for your sake, but concerning the election they are beloved for the sake of the fathers. 29 For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable.**

Let's pause here for a moment and notice something about the word *ōgospelō*. The word literally simply means *good news*. Let's consider what the *topic* of the good news is through the first four NT books, as this is another thing that should be in place in our understanding. When thinking of

that word ó gospel ó *many* Christians only ever think of it referring to the good news of Jesus dying on the cross for our sins. And while this is most certainly an aspect of the good news, this is not the thing most often referred to when the word is used. The following passages specifically spell out the way in which most of the references deal with this word:

- **Matthew 4:23 Jesus was going throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every kind of disease and every kind of sickness among the people.**
- **Matthew 24:14 This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all the nations, and then the end will come.**
- **Mark 1:14-15 Now after John had been taken into custody, Jesus came to Galilee, preaching the gospel of God, and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.”**

These are some of the things that must be in place in ones understanding as we come to the Book of Acts and the epistles. So, let’s go back to the gospels and see just what happened leading up to the transition in the Book of Acts. In the gospels, the offer of the kingdom of the heavens was solely being made to Israel, but as a nation they continued to spurn the offer, resulting in Jesus giving this parable the week leading up to His death. **Matthew 21:33 “Hear another parable: There was a certain landowner who planted a vineyard and set a hedge around it, dug a winepress in it and built a tower. And he leased it to vinedressers and went into a far country. 34 Now when vintage-time drew near, he sent his servants to the vinedressers, that they might receive its fruit. 35 And the vinedressers took his servants, beat one, killed one, and stoned another. 36 Again he sent other servants, more than the first, and they did likewise to them. 37 Then last of all he sent his son to them, saying, ‘They will respect my son.’ 38 But when the vinedressers saw the son, they said among themselves, ‘This is the heir. Come, let us kill him and seize his inheritance.’ 39 So they took him and cast him out of the vineyard and killed him. 40 Therefore, when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those vinedressers?” 41 They said to Him, “He will destroy those wicked men miserably, and lease his vineyard to other vinedressers who will render to him the fruits in their seasons.” 42 Jesus said to them, “Have you never read in the Scriptures: ‘The stone which the builders rejected Has become the chief cornerstone. This was the LORD’S doing, And it is marvelous in our eyes’? 43 Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a nation bearing the fruits of it. 44 And whoever falls on this stone will be broken; but on whomever it falls, it will grind him to powder.” 45 Now when the chief priests and Pharisees heard His parables, they perceived that He was speaking of them. 46 But when they sought to lay hands on Him, they feared the multitudes, because they took Him for a prophet.**

Jesus was revealing to the leadership of the Jews that their nation had continually spurned all that God had called them to do, even since the beginning. They had killed the very ones (the prophets) whom He had sent to them over the centuries calling them repentance so that they would begin to

produce the fruit that God expected of them. (Can we see here that there will be no participation in the Coming Kingdom apart from bearing the fruit that God calls His people to bear?) Jesus showed them that, in the end, they will have even killed the son of the land owner. And so because of their lack of fruit-bearing and their rebellion against God, Jesus withdrew the offer of the kingdom from the Nation, saying that He was going to give it to a nation bearing the fruit thereof.

Herein shows a reason of the importance for us to understand the way in which God gave His Word. *The Body of Christ* is the nation now called upon to bear fruit in order to participate in the Coming Kingdom of Christ. What a privilege that is! But if Christians do not understand these things, then how will the Church be any different than the Jews in Jesus' day? We need to understand God's message, and the way in which God gave His Word, seeing that the OT was written to God's people, Israel, and the gospels are really simply a continuation of the OT, all of which reveal God's plans and purposes for His people, Israel. But what if we don't know how we or the Church fit into the overall OT picture, as well as the gospels, the Book of Acts, and the epistles, we might miss something of *how the Body of Christ is to operate*. And in missing something here, a Christian may not hear "well done" at the JSOC, but rather will hear that they have practiced lawlessness!

So let's look back at the passage that we began with today and deal with it in light of the Church. Jesus says in **Matthew 7:13** **“Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. 14 Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it. 15 Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves. 16 You will know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thornbushes or figs from thistles? 17 Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. 18 A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. 19 Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. 20 Therefore by their fruits you will know them. 21 Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven.**

Can we do His will if we do not know the specifics of what He says about something? Jesus goes on to give an example of what either misunderstanding or not obeying the will of Father might look like: **22 Many will say to Me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?’ 23 And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!’**

So if it's been made so clear that the gospels are dealing with the Jews, then why would we now consider this passage as being related to us? It's because when Jesus withdrew the offer of the kingdom away from the Jews He said He would *give it to a nation producing the fruits of it*. Therefore, since the Church is that nation, shouldn't the Church assume a great need to understand the message of the kingdom? And since it is upon us individually to bear *good* fruit, a clear understanding of *proper* fruit-bearing is essential, as fruit-bearing has only ever to do with entering into the kingdom. And so, we would want to know what would cause Jesus to say to the *many* in that day, "Depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness." We would want to know what

practicing lawlessness looks like. A misunderstanding of the way God laid it all out would be ó the reason for Jesus saying these words to His people at each of the judgments.

Just as there were a relative *few* individual Jews in the previous dispensation who understood and believed the offer of the heavenly kingdom, and accepted God's Word concerning it, *many* Jews would not believe because their hearts were hardened. And with their hardened hearts, *many* will not be able to enter into the kingdom ó for many were called, but few will be chosen.

And so, the gospels end with the offer of the kingdom being withdrawn from the Nation of Israel, the Jewish Messiah being crucified, His resurrection, and His 40-day post resurrection ministry. And the Book of Acts opens with a brief description of His post-resurrection ministry, His ascension back into heaven, and the establishment of the new nation ó the Church.

And here in this dispensation, there are a relative *few* Christians who understand and believe the offer of the kingdom now being made to us, and who accept God's Word concerning it, there are *many* who have hearts that are hardened to the Word of God; there are many who simply don't want to give due diligence to understand God's Word in the way in which He laid it out (which is in itself a form of a hardened heart), and He will say to the *many*, "Depart from Me! you who practice lawlessness." They will not be able to enter in, for many are called, but few will be chosen.

This is why we must **Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth** (II Timothy 2:15). And it is with this in mind that we have considered these things today.

Hopefully, with this brief review of the way in which God laid out the OT leading in to the gospels, we can come to the Book of Acts with perhaps fresh understanding, because in all of this we would want to rightly divide His Word. Next week, we will look at the transition seen in this book, then the following week we will consider the epistles.