

Sunday May 31st 2015
God Gave His Word – a Transition from Gospels to the Epistles
The Book of Acts
(Part 2 of 3)

**II Timothy 2:15 Be diligent to present yourself approved to God,
A worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.**

Last week we considered how our approach to God's Word would have a direct effect on our outcome at the JSOC – a correct understanding (and a heart of obedience) would allow us to enter by the narrow gate that leads to life, but an incorrect understanding could put us on the broad path that leads to destruction. Specifically in the context concerning the narrow and broad ways, we heard Jesus saying: **Matthew 7: 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!'**

So exactly what does it mean to *practice lawlessness*? And how would prophesying or casting out demons, or doing wonders in His Name constitute lawlessness, when we have read about those things being done during Jesus's public ministry, as well as within the early Church? Is there a way to determine what should and shouldn't be done today with respect to these things?

The answer to these questions would most certainly be found in *rightly dividing the word of truth*, thereby allowing one to be approved by God at the judgment seat. This is what we want to look at today – one of the aspects of rightly dividing the Word of Truth!

Last week we did a very brief overview of the OT, and saw that God speaks directly to His people in every book and in every portion. The Scriptures are *spiritual* thoughts put into *spiritual* words, and only people who have been spiritually born can even begin to understand it (I Cor. 2:13).

Then we saw the fact that the first four books of the New Testament really are a continuation of the Old. God simply picks up where He left off. God's promises, given only to Abraham and to his descendants, have to do with his descendants receiving a kingdom both on earth and in the heavens. And while the OT (for the most part) deals with the earthly kingdom, the offer of the heavenly kingdom awaited the Expected One – the One Who would be King over both realms. (But even the heavenly realm of the kingdom can be seen in the OT Scriptures.) Therefore, at Christ's first coming, the only people on the face of the earth who were descendants of Abraham were the Jews, and so the offer of the heavenly kingdom could only be made to them. First, though, they had to repent from their sinful and rebellious ways which had, for the most part, marked their history since God brought forth the Nation. We also saw that the Gentiles were to fit into God's plans and purposes as well, having been prophesied in the OT that *those who walk in darkness* (Gentiles) *would see a great light* (Isa. 9:2).

Last week, we considered the fact that *before* the kingdom could be set up, two things would have to happen:

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.

With respect to point number one, the offer *had to be made to Israel first*, giving them the opportunity to repent and receive the kingdom. But because they would not repent, point number two came into play and was fulfilled. Of course, God knew this was the way things would go, as this was part of *the mystery* which He had laid out in the OT, a mystery which came to light through Paul's ministry (something which we will deal with in our next message). Therefore, the first thing listed here will be fulfilled yet future, after an entire dispensation runs its course. It will be at that time God will once again pick up His dealings with Israel, and through the 7-year tribulation bring Israel to repentance and acceptance. Thus, both events listed here will have been brought to pass and the kingdom will be set up.

Since Israel as a Nation continually rejected the message that John, Jesus and the Twelve brought to them, in the final week of Jesus' public ministry He withdrew the offer of the kingdom away from the Jews and would offer it to *a nation producing the fruit thereof*. From the moment of that withdrawal forward, Jesus did not mention the kingdom again to any Jewish group or person, except to those few who had believed in Him. These individuals would be the first to make up the new creation in Christ.

But when considering this offer being withdrawn from Israel, there is another thing that must be factored in if we are going to *rightly divide the Word of Truth*, and this becomes the groundwork for the Book of Acts. We would have to factor in a parable Jesus gave prior to His withdrawal of the offer: **Luke 13:6 He also spoke this parable: "A certain man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard, and he came seeking fruit on it and found none. 7 Then he said to the keeper of his vineyard, 'Look, for three years I have come seeking fruit on this fig tree and find none. Cut it down; why does it use up the ground?' 8 But he answered and said to him, 'Sir, let it alone this year also, until I dig around it and fertilize it. 9 And if it bears fruit, well. But if not, after that you can cut it down.'"**

Often times in Scripture *trees* refer to *national entities*. The fig tree here represents the Nation of Israel. The lack of fruit on the fig tree represents Israel's lack of fruit-bearing (which would be the very reason Jesus would withdraw the offer of the kingdom away from the Jews). The desire of the owner of the vineyard to cut down the tree for its lack of fruit points to the withdrawal of the offer; but the request to let it alone for another period of time represents the *reoffer* of the kingdom to Israel, thus giving Israel another chance to bear fruit fit for the kingdom. And, according to this parable, if at the end of that time no fruit was born, then the tree would be cut down pointing to the Nation of Israel ultimately being completely set aside (for an entire dispensation).

From our vantage point, hind-sight allows us to know that this is exactly what took place during the time-period covered in the Book of Acts. Israel would continue to be barren even given the second chance, and *the tree would be cut down in the end* or the reoffer would be completely withdrawn from the Nation by the end of Acts.

However, further study of OT prophecy would reveal that God is not finished with Israel yet, though they are presently set aside. Paul, in speaking with respect to the Nation of Israel, reminded the Church in **Romans 11:29** [that] **the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable**. And we remember that Moses wrote in **Numbers 23:19** **“God is not a man, that He should lie, Nor a son of man, that He should repent. Has He said, and will He not do? Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good?”** Israel would yet be the depository of the promises God made to Abraham and to his descendants. And we can see that God will yet restore and rebuild Israel during the coming age: **Amos 9:11** **“On that day I will raise up The tabernacle of David, which has fallen down, And repair its damages; I will raise up its ruins, And rebuild it as in the days of old.”**

So today we are going to look at the time-period covered in the Book of Acts to see just what this reoffer looked like as it was described in our parable, and how it ended. This timeframe runs from about 33AD through about 62AD or so, from beginning of the Book of Acts to its end.

The Book of Acts

In Acts chapter one, the author briefly tells of the 40-day post resurrection ministry of Jesus, summarizing it this way: **Acts 1:1** **The former account I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach, 2 until the day in which He was taken up, after He through the Holy Spirit had given commandments to the apostles whom He had chosen, 3 to whom He also presented Himself alive after His suffering by many infallible proofs, being seen by them during forty days and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God. 4 And being assembled together with them, He commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the Promise of the Father, “which,” He said, “you have heard from Me; 5 for John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.” 6 Therefore, when they had come together, they asked Him, saying, “Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?” 7 And He said to them, “It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority. 8 But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” 9 Now when He had spoken these things, while they watched, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. 10 And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as He went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel, 11 who also said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven.”**

According to v. 3, we learn that in Jesus' 40-day post resurrection ministry His focus was the things pertaining to the kingdom of God. (Of course, it would be!) Then just prior to His ascension, He told His disciples to go to Jerusalem and *wait for the Promise of the Father*, which had to do with their being baptized with the Holy Spirit as He had previously told them (Lu. 24:49); then He called them to be His witnesses *in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth*. So they returned to Jerusalem and waited.

In Jerusalem

Then we read in **Acts 2:1** **When the Day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. 2 And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty**

wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. 3 Then there appeared to them divided tongues, as of fire, and one sat upon each of them. 4 And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance. 5 And there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men, from every nation under heaven. 6 And when this sound occurred, the multitude came together, and were confused, because everyone heard them speak in his own language. 7 Then they were all amazed and marveled, saying to one another, "Look, are not all these who speak Galileans? 12 So they were all amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, "Whatever could this mean?" 13 Others mocking said, "They are full of new wine."

The disciples, having been filled with the Holy Spirit, began speaking in tongues of languages which they previously had not been able to speak. This was indeed supernatural, and the event that marked both the institution of the new nation (the Church), as well as the beginning of the reoffer of the kingdom being made to Israel by the Church. And this gave Peter the first opportunity to speak to the Men of Judea and all who were dwelling in Jerusalem. Acts 2:15 "For these are not drunk, as you suppose, since it is only the third hour of the day. 16 But this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel: 17 'And it shall come to pass in the last days, says God, That I will pour out of My Spirit on all flesh; Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, Your young men shall see visions, Your old men shall dream dreams. 18 And on My menservants and on My maidservants I will pour out My Spirit in those days; And they shall prophesy. 19 I will show wonders in heaven above And signs in the earth beneath: Blood and fire and vapor of smoke. 20 The sun shall be turned into darkness, And the moon into blood, Before the coming of the great and awesome day of the LORD. 21 And it shall come to pass That whoever calls on the name of the LORD Shall be saved.' So the miraculous sign gift of tongues was the beginning of God fulfilling a prophecy that He had given to Israel through the prophet Joel, a prophecy having to do with God pouring out His Spirit in the last days as described here in the passage, days just *before the coming of the great and awesome day of the LORD* of referring to the Millennial Reign of Christ. Right here it is easy to see that two things must be in view when this prophecy is fulfilled: Israel and the kingdom.

Then Peter continued with a call to their repentance: 22 "Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a Man attested by God to you by miracles, wonders, and signs which God did through Him in your midst, as you yourselves also know-- 23 Him, being delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death; 24 whom God raised up, having loosed the pains of death, because it was not possible that He should be held by it... . . . 33 Therefore being exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He poured out this which you now see and hear.36 Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ." 37 Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" 38 Then Peter said to them, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. 39 For the promise is to you and to your children [the promise given to Joel], and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call."

And so the reoffer of *the kingdom* to *Israel* (those two things necessary for Joel's prophecy to be fulfilled) began through the newly instituted Church, which at that time was solely made up of Jews. At the beginning of the Church, the Holy Spirit was poured out upon God's people, and they could speak in tongues, so that the Jews ó gathered in Jerusalem from all around the known world for the Jewish Feast of Pentecost ó would be able to hear the message of repentance and acceptance from Peter in their own language, in their own dialect, thus giving Israel the second chance, referenced in the parable we just looked at in Luke 13. Just as in the original offer, so too here in the reoffer, there would be miraculous signs present in order to validate the ministry of the ones making the offer or reoffer, for it is the Jew that requires a sign. **I Corinthians 1:22 For Jews request a sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom.** (The English word *request* in this verse is translated *requires* in the KJV. It is a Greek word that is defined as *a demand for something due.*) And the sign that was manifested to the Jews in Jerusalem on the Day of the Jewish festival ó the Feast of Pentecost ó was tongues, and that was for a reason. Look what Paul said about the sign-gift of tongues in **I Corinthians 14:22 Therefore tongues are for a sign, not to those who believe but to unbelievers...** And so we see the Jewish disciples of Jesus who made up the early Church on the Feast of Pentecost being able to speak in languages they could not speak prior to this day, so that the *unbelieving Jews*, gathered in Jerusalem from all over the known world *could hear* in their own language the call to repentance and the reoffer of the kingdom, and *believe*.

(FYI: I looked up all the uses of the specific Greek word *semeion*, which is translated into the English using either of two words ó *signs* or *miracles*. This word is used 69 times in the NT. Here is the breakdown of its uses:

- 40 times in the gospels (many times used when the Jews asked Jesus to show them a sign in order to prove that He was Who He said He was);
- 13 times in Acts, during the reoffer of kingdom to Israel;
- 8 times in the epistles ó but *only* in the epistles which were written during the time covered in the Book of Acts; and
- 7 times in Revelation.

These facts validate the idea that miraculous signs are used only in conjunction with *the kingdom* being on offer to the *Jews*, because it is the Jew that requires a sign. You take either of those two things away from the picture (take the Jews out of the picture, OR take the offer of the kingdom away from the Jews) and you lose the purpose for the miraculous signs, and therefore they cease! We will see this more clearly as we progress in this message, and in next week's message.)

So, of course we can see miraculous signs occurring in the early Church, during a time in which the reoffer of the kingdom was being made to those in Jerusalem. And during this time, Peter had opportunity to call the Jews to repentance a number of times within these early chapters, witnessing to them even through miraculous healings, just as Jesus did at His first coming. Within the first five chapters in the Book of Acts, we witness Peter giving the men and leaders of the Nation in Jerusalem no less than four opportunities to repent from their sins and from crucifying the Holy One of Israel, so that the kingdom could be set up. **Acts 3:19 “Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, 20 and that He may send Jesus Christ, who was preached to you before, 21 whom heaven must receive until the times of restoration of all things, which God has spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began.**

And through Peter's preaching thousands of Jews were being added to their numbers ó 3,000 in Acts 2, and 5,000 in Acts 4. These numbers alarmed the leadership of the Jews, who then warned and threatened Peter and the others, and as a result, the disciples prayed this: **Acts 4:29** "Now, Lord, look on their threats, and grant to Your servants that with all boldness they may speak Your word, 30 by stretching out Your hand to heal, and that signs and wonders may be done through the name of Your holy Servant Jesus." 31 And when they had prayed, the place where they were assembled together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke the word of God with boldness.

So things continued: **Acts 5:12** And through the hands of the apostles many signs and wonders were done among the people. And they were all with one accord in Solomon's Porch. 13 Yet none of the rest dared join them, but the people esteemed them highly. 14 And believers were increasingly added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women, 15 so that they brought the sick out into the streets and laid them on beds and couches, that at least the shadow of Peter passing by might fall on some of them. 16 Also a multitude gathered from the surrounding cities to Jerusalem, bringing sick people and those who were tormented by unclean spirits, and they were all healed. All the while, the Jews being added to the Church were increasing greatly in number, even in addition to the 8,000 mentioned above. (In several subsequent places it says that "multitudes" were being added.) Up to this point Peter and the disciples had not yet stepped foot out of Jerusalem. Remember Jesus telling them on the day of His resurrection that they should be His witnesses *in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth*. Up to this point, they had only witnessed in Jerusalem; but things were about to change.

In chapter six, Stephen is introduced. Verse 5 says he was a man "full of faith and the Holy Spirit," and v. 8 says he was "full of faith and power." As a result of the way in which Stephen represented the Lord, the Jews in Jerusalem sought to bring him before the Council, having secretly induced a number of people to give false witnesses against him. Then at the beginning of chapter seven, he was brought before the council and was asked him if the things (spoken by the false witnesses) were true. Rather than defending himself, Stephen, being filled by the Holy Spirit, gave a *powerful* message to the Jewish leadership. At first glance, it may appear that his message was simply another history lesson of their ancestral lineage, but again, their history serves more than a lesson here; and the heightened reaction of the rulers to what he said would indicate this fact beyond any question.

Stephen opened his message by reminding them of the promises God had given to them through Abraham, their father. Their history from that point reveals God taking steps to bring those promises to fruition. Then he recalled to them that their fathers had time and time again acted contrary to God and to the individuals God had sent to them for their good ó notably Joseph (the favored son of Jacob) and Moses (who was raised in royalty). Towards both of these men, their fathers had acted contrary. Stephen used these recorded historical facts from past events to show the leadership of the Jews that they had in fact acted in the same way as their fathers had, as he levels this accusation against them: **Acts 7:51** "You stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears! You always resist the Holy Spirit; as your fathers did, so do you. 52 Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who foretold the coming of

the Just One, of whom you now have become the betrayers and murderers, 53 who have received the law by the direction of angels and have not kept it.”

This was yet another call to the leadership of the Nation in Jerusalem to come to repentance. But again, they would not repent as it says that *they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed at him with their teeth* (v. 54). The text goes on to say: **Acts 7:55 But he [Stephen], being full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God, 56 and said, “Look! I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!” 57 Then they cried out with a loud voice, stopped their ears, and ran at him with one accord; 58 and they cast him out of the city and stoned him. And the witnesses laid down their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul.**

With this powerful call to repentance, God allowed Stephen to have insight into what was taking place in heaven at that very moment. So powerful was this message that at the end of it, God showed Stephen that *Jesus was standing up* as if ready to come back again *if the Nation would simply repent!* But instead of repenting, they rushed upon Stephen (the messenger God had sent to call them once again to repentance) and took him out of the city and stoned him to death, having *laid their clothes at the feet of young man named Saul.* God’s timing here is *meticulous!* If they had repented, the Father would have sent the Son back for the times of refreshing that Peter had already told them about. But as their hearts were becoming more and more hardened to the message of repentance and the kingdom, as evidence by their response, God introduces Saul of Tarsus ó a man who later became known as Paul.

In Judea and Samaria

And so, with the stoning of Stephen (Acts 7) and the initial zeal of Saul to persecute the Church, the disciples were scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria. **Acts 8:1 Now Saul was consenting to his death. At that time a great persecution arose against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles.** So, due to the great persecution in Jerusalem, these disciples of Christ were scattered from Jerusalem (the capital of Israel) to the regions of Judea (the southern portion of Israel) and Samaria (the middle portion of Israel) to spread the Good News in these parts, just as Jesus had commanded them prior to His ascending into heaven. But even still ó at this point ó the recipients of the Good News were Jews only; Gentiles didn’t really become part of the picture until Acts chapter ten.

Initially, Saul was the great persecutor of the newly established Church. He was a ðHebrew of the Hebrews,ö a Pharisee himself (Phil. 3:5), whom, as we will see in a moment, God chose to take the message of the Kingdom to the Gentiles. But here, Saul gave his consent to the stoning of Stephen. This moment became a real turning point for the Jews.

Acts chapter nine shows that Saul had become so zealous to persecute the Church that he went far and wide to bring Christians (repentant and converted Jews) from these out-lying regions back to Jerusalem in order to punish and imprison them. It was on one of these trips that the now-glorified Jesus Christ spoke to Saul. Jesus showed him that it was He Whom Saul was persecuting. At this, God struck him blind.

For our purposes here, we will not go into too much detail about these things, but we can know that this was not only a life-changing experience for Saul, but also made a way for an *eventual* change in the direction of the Church (as we will see in a moment). It was on the third day of Saul's blindness that the Lord sent Ananias to Saul saying: **Acts 9:15 ... "Go, for he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel. 16 For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name's sake."** When Ananias went to Saul, scales fell from Saul's eyes, and his sight returned. By the end of this chapter, he had already begun giving powerful messages to the Jews in the synagogue in Damascus telling them that Jesus is the Christ, and as a result of this change of heart in Saul, the Jews plotted to kill him. At some point in all of this, the Lord took him away to Arabia for a three year period in order to teach him: **Galatians 1:15 But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb and called me through His grace, 16 to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately confer with flesh and blood, 17 nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me; but I went to Arabia, and returned again to Damascus. 18 Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter, and remained with him fifteen days.**

During these ensuing three years, the Word of the Lord continued to spread in Judea and Samaria, and now Galilee, a northern portion of Israel. Peter continued healing people ó even raising one woman from the dead, and through these miraculous signs, more and more Jews came to believe that Jesus is the Messiah.

Then in Acts chapter ten, we see the *first* Gentile being converted in about 40 AD. God had given Peter a heavenly vision, revealing to him that God was opening the way for Gentiles to come to the faith. Immediately thereafter, Peter had opportunity to preach to the Gentiles with many becoming saved. When Peter went back to Jerusalem, the believing Jews had heard that Peter had fellowshiped with Gentiles and were troubled by that, so they asked him about it. Peter recounted the whole story for them in Acts 11:1-18, at the end of which they all rejoiced that God was extending His grace to Gentiles as well.

It is in this time-frame that we can see a very progressive yet distinct change in focus. Prior to the stoning of Stephen, the focus of ministry was solely towards the Jews in Jerusalem. But with their continual rejection of the message of the kingdom, as evidenced by the stoning of Stephen, the focus began to move from Jerusalem into Judea, Samaria and Galilee, and then even beyond there towards the Gentiles. And with this shift, the focus began to be more and more on Paul's ministry rather than on Peter's. In fact, after Acts 12, Peter's name is only mentioned one additional time in the Book of Acts (Acts 15:7). It is in Acts 13 where we clearly see God sending Saul (now to be known as Paul) and Barnabas out to minister amongst the Gentiles. So now the book begins to trace the movements of Paul as he went from city to city. The remainder of the book then covers about a 22 year period or so (from about 40 AD to about 62 AD).

To the End of the Earth

For purposes in our study, there are a few things we will need to take note of here. During the time-period covered in Acts, when Paul entered into any city or area he would *always* go to the Jews first, and then to the Gentiles. This was his mode of operation. Then when the Jews rejected Paul's message of the kingdom, Paul would turn to the Gentiles, giving them *the whole counsel of*

God's Word. This scenario happened time and time again. But let's pause for a moment and realize something here. It is necessary to understand that this offer of the kingdom *can only be made to saved people* ó to people who had already received eternal life through faith in the death and shed blood of Passover. When Paul went to the Jews making the reoffer, he was going to a generation of Jewish people who had already believed in the provision God had made for them *prior* to Christ's death ó the death and shed blood of the paschal lambs of Passover (which, of course, pointed to the eventual death of Jesus, Who was the Lamb of God Who came to take away the sins of the world). Those who had been saved prior to Christ's death could not be saved all over again! So, with the Jews, Paul could *begin with* the offer of the kingdom.

But when Paul went to Gentiles, he couldn't begin with the offer of the kingdom; he had to begin by showing them that Jesus was their Passover Lamb, Who died for their sins as well. A good example to see this was when Paul was in prison in Philippi. **Acts 16:27 And the keeper of the prison [a Gentile], awaking from sleep and seeing the prison doors open, supposing the prisoners had fled, drew his sword and was about to kill himself. 28 But Paul called with a loud voice, saying, "Do yourself no harm, for we are all here." 29 Then he called for a light, ran in, and fell down trembling before Paul and Silas. 30 And he brought them out and said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" 31 So they said, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household." 32 Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house.**

So then, once the Gentiles believed on Jesus, he would teach them about the Coming Kingdom of Christ. Again, this happened time and time again ó Paul would go to the Jews first with the message of the Coming Kingdom and when they rejected it, he would take the message to the Gentiles, beginning with the good news of the grace of God concerning Jesus as Passover before telling them the good news of the kingdom, both of which make up *the full counsel of God's Word* according to Acts 22:24-27.

And so because the Nation continued to spurn the reoffer of the kingdom, we can jump to the end of the Book of Acts and realize that it was finally withdrawn *totally* from them. Here we see Paul in Rome, making what appears to be his final plea to the Jews there: **Acts 28:23 So when they had appointed him a day, many [Jews] came to him at his lodging, to whom he explained and solemnly testified of the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus from both the Law of Moses and the Prophets, from morning till evening. 24 And some were persuaded by the things which were spoken, and some disbelieved. 25 So when they did not agree among themselves, they departed after Paul had said one word: "The Holy Spirit spoke rightly through Isaiah the prophet to our fathers, 26 saying, 'Go to this people and say: "Hearing you will hear, and shall not understand; And seeing you will see, and not perceive; 27 For the hearts of this people have grown dull. Their ears are hard of hearing, and their eyes they have closed, Lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears, Lest they should understand with their hearts and turn, So that I should heal them."' 28 Therefore let it be known to you that the salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles, and they will hear it!"**
– they who make up the new nation, they who will produce the fruits of it.

Then a few years later in 70AD, Jerusalem was sacked and burned, and the temple destroyed by the Roman commander, Titus, the son of the Emperor. In the years beyond the close of the Book of Acts, Paul continued his ministry, but his total focus would now be on the Church.

So now, perhaps we can understand why it was necessary to put two weeks of study into seeing how Scripture leads into the epistles! It is to understand that the specific epistles which were written *during* the time-period covered in Acts when the reoffer was still open to the Jews would necessarily deal with the sign-gifts, because both *Israel* and *the kingdom* were still in view. But once *the fruitless fig tree was cut down for lack of bearing fruit*, (once Israel was taken out of the picture) miraculous signs ceased, as it is the Jew who required the signs. Greeks (Gentiles) only need wisdom ó they only need to be taught truth, having laid the proper foundation. And so the sign gifts ceased for the remainder of this dispensation. Therefore, any epistle written beyond Acts 28:28 would not refer to any miraculous signs being done at all, *not even one*. And this is exactly what we see with respect to any and all epistles written after Acts 28:28.

At the beginning of this message we saw that Joel's prophecy (concerning the promise of the Holy Spirit and miracles therewith) had *begun* to be fulfilled on the Day of Pentecost. But due to the ongoing resistance on the part of the Jewish leadership, it could not be completely fulfilled at that time. But the good news is...that One Day, Joel's prophecy will be *completely* fulfilled in Israel, and Gentile nations will be blessed through it. Once the Church is resurrected/raptured, and the events of the Tribulation will have brought Israel to repentance and belief, *then* the promise of these things will be brought to fruition.

(Please note: All of this is not to say that God will not, nor cannot perform miracles even today. Of course He can perform miracles today, as He determines when and where. But miraculous signs would not be seen today on the basis as that seen at Christ's first coming or during the Book of Acts.)

And so we can begin to understand what *doing the will of the Father* would look like with respect to these things, as opposed to what the working of *lawlessness* might look like with respect to prophesying and casting out demons and doing wondrous works in His Name. 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.**

Lord willing, next week we will continue with a look into these two groups of epistles ó those written prior to Acts 28:28, and those written thereafter.