

January, 2015

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THE KINGDOM OFFER IN THE BOOK OF ACTS

By Dee L. McCroskey

March, 1972

THE RENEWED OFFER OF THE KINGDOM IN ACTS

Was God starting the Church which is the One Body of Christ in the beginning chapters of Acts, or was He making a renewed offer of the Kingdom to Israel?

The underlying cause of our problem lies, I believe, not in the question itself, but in our background of tradition. Truth never comes easily. It is always opposed by the traditions of men. It always has to work its way up, painfully and laboriously, through the avalanche of tradition under which men are constantly burying it.

After more than a thousand years of such spiritual darkness that even the historians called it "the dark ages," the Reformers in Luther's day dared to defy the religious traditionists with the Word of Truth. They recovered some precious truths, but they knew very little of dispensational truth. The Brethren movement came much farther dispensationally, but even they fell short of fully understanding the difference between God's program for Israel and His program for the Church which is the One Body of Christ.

It has been the natural tendency of all of us, including yours truly, to take these traditions for granted, and argue for them, rather than apply God's rule, "Nevertheless, what saith the Scriptures?"

The Surveyors' Big Mistake

Recently a brother told us about the predicament of a certain town. It seems that a hundred years or so ago, the surveyors who laid out the town made a bad mistake. What to do about it now, is the big problem. Part of nearly everybody's property really belongs to a neighbor, and some people's property line is out in the street!

That is exactly what has happened in the spiritual realm. During the early 1800s the Brethren movement came upon the scene, and was mightily used of God to recover some long lost truths. They made considerable progress in dispensational truth during the life of John Nelson Darby, but stopped short at his death in 1882, and God has had to raise up others to go on with it.

So it was that Surveyor Darby made his big mistake. Perhaps he leaned too hard upon the traditions of men before him. He left his brethren with the old tradition that the One Body began at Pentecost, that it was under the so-called commission of Matt. 28:19 and under the ordinance of water baptism. (These three things all go together.)

Then came Surveyor Scofield, and all the rest of the fundamentalist surveyors. They all did the normal thing. They took Darby's bearings for granted. Most of us brethren did the same. This wall of tradition about the beginning of the Church has so molded our thinking that it is difficult for us to be good Bereans and approach the subject with unbiased minds.

Tradition versus Truth

It is a tribute to our beloved brother Thompson that when he came to see that neither the Great Commission nor water Baptism is for us today, he openly declared his stand on this truth, even though it cost him much criticism for a while. To stand for God's truth today in opposition to traditionalism, still calls for more courage than any of us possesses by nature!

Since that day, however, God has brought His saints much farther along in dispensational understanding. It is true that some have gone to an extreme, as must be expected. But at least there are thousands of believers who are now taking a second look at Acts chapter two, and have stopped reading into it such expressions as "the birthday of the Church."

My Own Problem--The Church Booklet

Thirty years ago, in 1942, I wrote the little Church Booklet. It filled a great need, in spite of its faults, and was a blessing, particularly in its main theme, which was to show the difference between man's churches and God's true Church, which is the One Body of Christ.

My biggest problem came from the fact that I had placed the historic beginning of the One Body at Pentecost, and much of the booklet was built upon the mistaken assumption that Acts 2:47, "And the Lord added to the church daily," was proof, beyond all doubt, that this was the Church's birthday. I was another victim of the Darby-Scofield traditionalism. Later in this paper I will take up that matter of Acts 2:47.

During the 25 years that we published the booklet, I was being constantly challenged to prove that the One Body did begin at Pentecost. But I could never prove it from the Scriptures, because nowhere in the Bible does it ever say any such thing. All I could ever do was attempt to defend my position by round-about arguments and reasonings, something that has ever been too prevalent among us. How much nicer it is when we have a plain, simple, "Thus saith the Lord!"

Other Problems

Other problems that bothered me about the Church beginning at Pentecost:

1. It was a prophesied Jewish feast day, not consistent with the Church as "the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations" (Col. 1:26).
2. Jewish terms throughout--"men of Judaea," "men of Israel," etc.
3. The problem of Joel's prophecy, which has nothing to do with the Church, but is a prophecy of the advent of the Holy Spirit "before the great and terrible day of the Lord," before Christ's second coming for the Kingdom.
4. Acts 2:38, the one gospel appeal verse in the whole chapter, and yet not a single one of us would go out preaching that verse today. Very strange situation, if we are really on Church ground in Acts two. Very strange!

Why There HAD to Be a Second Offer of the Kingdom
During the Acts Period

On the cross our Lord had made a most significant prayer: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34).

Unless we are willing to take the unthinkable assumption that the Father refused to hear the prayer of His dying Son, we have no alternative but to believe that this loving prayer from the cross obtained for the guilty nation another opportunity to receive their Kingdom and their King, this time in resurrection.

This prayer was poured out in infinite love in behalf of the transgressors, in fulfillment of Isaiah 53:12, "He bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors." It is true that some of the Pharisees and rulers of Israel knew what they were doing. But there were some who, like Saul of Tarsus, were in ignorance and did not know. Further, the Lord knew that thousands of the people of Israel did not know what they were doing.

Peter, speaking to this same people later, in Acts 3:17-19, leaves us with no doubt as to the significance of this prayer on the cross. He said, "And now, brethren, I know that through ignorance ye did it, as did also your rulers. . . . Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord."

Some say that this prayer will obtain another chance for Israel, but not until the Tribulation time. This argument will not do, because the Lord was praying about the specific crime of the crucifixion, and for that generation that did it, not a future generation. It would be quite unjust for God to blame a generation as yet unborn for this crime. The second offer HAD to be in the lifetime of those people of that day.

Peter makes this clear beyond dispute in Acts 3, when he said "YE DID IT." He had already accused that generation of the crucifixion, back in 2:36, where he said, "Jesus, whom YE CRUCIFIED." The renewed offer had to come in the Acts.

Was God "Actively" Offering the Kingdom?

I believe that would be a faulty expression. God, in His foreknowledge, knew that Israel would again reject His offer. It could hardly be said, then, that God was "actively" trying to persuade them to accept the Kingdom offer. Then what WAS God doing? He was dealing with Israel in a way that would leave them without excuse. He was going to leave them reduced to the same status as the Gentiles--under sin. So that Paul could later write in Romans 3:9, "We have before proved both Jews and Gentiles, that they are all under sin."

In the Old Testament Israel had rejected God the Father to rule over them. In the Gospels they rejected God the Son. In the Acts they rejected and "resisted" the testimony of the Holy Spirit. They denied their Messiah, first in incarnation, and then in resurrection. They became utterly without excuse.

Were There Actually Two Kingdom Offers?

Most of the fundamentalist camp, in order to hang on to the Great Commission and water baptism, teach that there was an offer of the Kingdom to Israel during the Lord's early earthly ministry, that it was rejected, that the Lord then turned to preparing the way for His Church, and that this ended the Kingdom offer completely until the Tribulation time.

This is another product of the mistakes of the Darby-Scofield surveyors. It has built up an impressive wall of tradition, but it will not stand the test of rightly dividing the Word of truth.

I think no one can deny that the Kingdom was offered during the first 12 chapters of Matthew, nor that there seems to be a turning point at the end of Matthew chapter 12. But two things must be recognized, (1) that again, God in His foreknowledge knew that Israel would reject the offer, but that He must leave them without excuse; the eternal record must read that they rejected their King and Messiah in His incarnation, and later in His resurrection, and (2) that the Old Testament prophets foresaw the Messiah taking His Kingdom throne only after His death on the cross and His resurrection.

So then, the Kingdom offer in Matthew must be viewed as quite incomplete, and quite preliminary to a second offer later. Its main purpose was that Christ might be a Minister to Israel, "to confirm the promises made unto the fathers" (Romans 15:8).

Isaiah's Solemn Indictment Invoked Twice

In Isaiah 6:9-10, God had made a most solemn indictment of His people Israel. "And He said, Go, and tell this people, Hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not. Make the heart of this people fat, and make their eyes heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert, and be healed."

After the Lord Jesus had offered Himself as Israel's King through the first 12 chapters of Matthew, then He began in the 13th chapter to give them the seven parables. The disciples asked why He spoke to the multitudes in parables. In answer, He quoted this Isaiah indictment against them, verses 13-15. "In them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah," He said. This should have officially ended Israel's chance for any further Kingdom offer. This should have been the final straw, the end of their hope.

Why, then wasn't it? Why did God offer them a second opportunity in Acts? Because in between the two offers came His sacrificial death on the cross and His resurrection, preceded by His loving prayer for them on the cross--Luke 23:34.

Thus mercy found a way for a second Kingdom offer in Acts. God patiently suffered their continued rejections, up to the final one at Rome, the last outpost of dispersed Jews. Then came the final invoking of the Isaiah indictment, by the Apostle Paul, in Acts 28:26-27. This was God's final word to Israel until after the Church is raptured out: "Be it known therefore unto you, that the salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles, and that they will hear it."

The Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of Heaven

Again, thanks to the Darby-Scofield surveyors, we are indebted to the errors in the Scofield notes for much of our present confusion regarding these two terms, the Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of Heaven. On the whole, I think the Scofield notes are good, and that the Scofield Bible has been a very great blessing to God's people. But there are some errors in the notes, and it is a sad fact that some saints put almost as much credence in the notes as in the Word.

As an example, the note in the Old Scofield on Matt. 28:19, the so-called Great Commission, reads: "With the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ begins 'the dispensation of the grace of God'." They just had to get the Great Commission and water baptism into the One Body, even if they had to read Eph. 3:2 into Matthew! Thankfully, the New Scofield left out this erroneous note.

But to my mind, the most misleading of all the Old Scofield notes is the one on Matthew 6:33, "Seek ye first the Kingdom of God." First, the note says the kingdom of God is to be distinguished from the kingdom of heaven. Then it pictures the kingdom of God as being the universal kingdom, while the kingdom of heaven is seen as a sphere of profession in the present age.

None of these assumptions can be found in the Word. Nowhere in the Bible does it ever say, or even hint, that the kingdom of heaven and the kingdom of God are two different kingdoms. The note in the New Scofield is much more cautious, but it also insists that there is a difference between the two terms, and that "the kingdom of God includes the kingdom of heaven," and that the former is entered by the new birth while the other is a sphere of profession.

The Two Terms in the Four Gospels

The simple, honest truth is that in the Four Gospels the two terms are used interchangeably, and both refer to the earthly kingdom, the hope of Israel. Matthew alone uses the term kingdom of heaven; Mark and Luke never use it. Mark and Luke always refer to the earthly kingdom as the kingdom of God, and Matthew uses it in that sense a few times. John uses it in that sense in his third chapter. Proof of these facts is easily seen in the Word:

1. Even Matthew uses the two terms interchangeably in 19:23-24. In four other references, Matthew uses the two terms interchangeably when we compare the equivalent contexts. Compare 6:33 with 5:3, 5:10, 5:20. Compare 11:12-18 with 12:28-31. Compare 21:31-32 with 3:2. Compare 21:43 with 22:2.

(And again, ignore the misleading Old Scofield note on Matt. 21:43. The kingdom of God is not "the larger term," nor has God ever taken the kingdom away from Israel and given it to the Gentiles, nor does Romans 9:30-33 say any such thing at all! These figments of human imagination were too much even for the New Scofield editors. Their note is not so bad).

2. A comparison of parallel references in Matthew, Mark and Luke will also show conclusively that the terms, kingdom of heaven and kingdom of God mean exactly the same thing, the earthly or millennial Kingdom. I give three examples:

In Matthew and Mark

"From that time Jesus began to preach and to say, Repent, for the KINGDOM OF HEAVEN is at hand" (Matt.4:17).

"And saying, The time is fulfilled, and the KINGDOM OF GOD is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel" (Mark 1:15).

In Matthew, Mark and Luke

"He answered and said unto them, Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the KINGDOM OF HEAVEN, but to them it is not given" (Matt. 13:11).

"And He said unto them, Unto you it is given to know the mystery of the KINGDOM OF GOD: but unto them that are without, all these things are done in parables: (Mark 4:11).

"And He said, Unto you it is given to know the mysteries of the KINGDOM OF GOD: but to others in parables; that seeing they might not see, and hearing they might not understand" (Luke 8:10).

In Matthew and Luke

"But Jesus said, Suffer little children and forbid them not to come unto Me: for such is the KINGDOM OF HEAVEN" (Matt. 19:14).

"But Jesus called them unto Him and said, Suffer little children to come unto Me and forbid them not: for of such is the KINGDOM OF GOD!" (Luke 18:16).

Compare also, Matthew 5:3 with Luke 6:20; Matthew 11:11 with Luke 7:28; Matthew 13:31 with Mark 4:30-31; and Matthew 19:23 with Mark 10:23 and Luke 18:24.

The Kingdom of Heaven

The term "Kingdom of heaven" is a prophetic term, stemming from Daniel 2:44: "And in the days of these kings shall the GOD OF HEAVEN SET UP A KINGDOM which shall never be destroyed." It thus fittingly goes with the Kingdom Gospel, which is Matthew, where it is used some 33 times. When John the Baptist and the Lord Jesus both came proclaiming, "Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand," they gave no explanation as to what this term meant. Why? Because they were using a term which everybody knew; it was common knowledge. It is an old axiom that an explanation of a term is only needed when an entirely new thing is introduced into a program.

The Kingdom of God

In the Four Gospels--It consistently refers to the earthly Kingdom.

In Acts--Luke consistently carries the term right on from his Gospel and into Acts, referring to the earthly Kingdom. For instance, in Acts 1:3 he writes that the Lord was seen of them forty days, "speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God." The subject of the Kingdom had not changed since Luke 22:30, when these same Apostles were told that they would be in His Kingdom, and sit on twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel. The question asked by the Apostles in Acts 1:6 shows that the earthly kingdom was all that they knew at the time. The expression, "kingdom of God," is used for the earthly kingdom all through Acts, but seems to take on a more Pauline significance in 28:31, which will be discussed later.

In Paul's Epistles--We find the Kingdom of God in its spiritual and universal sense in Paul's Epistles. For example, in Romans 14:17, "For the Kingdom of God is not meat and drink, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit." And again in I Cor. 15:50, "Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of God." This Kingdom of God is called "the kingdom of His dear Son" in Col. 1:13; "His heavenly kingdom," in II Tim. 4:18; and "the kingdom of Christ and of God" in Eph. 5:5.

The "Ecclesia"

This is another term that needs considering. Our English word "church" is not a literal translation of the Greek word ecclesia, but comes from a word that means a sanctuary, or a heathen temple. Nobody has yet found any reason why the King James translators used this rendering.

The Greek word ecclesia means a "called-out company," or assembly. I have often wondered how different our understanding of the Scriptures might have been if the translators had rendered it "assembly" instead of "church." Ecclesia was a Greek common noun, used for all kinds of gatherings, including the town council in Acts 19:32,41. Religious tradition has placed a certain sacred emphasis upon our word "church" which was never upon the original word, ecclesia. To prove this, try reading verse 41 this way: "And when he (the townclerk) had thus spoken, he dismissed the church!"

Wherever the Lord Jesus and His believing followers were together, they were a small ecclesia, called apart from the main body of Israel. The same is true of the 120 in the upper room in Acts 1. They had taken their stand with the Lord; they were a called-out company. Peter recognized this when he said in Acts 2:40, "Save yourselves from this untoward generation." That is, come out from the mainstream of Israel who were in unbelief.

The 3,000 converts in Acts 2:41 were added to the 120, the local Jerusalem ecclesia, or assembly. It is the ecclesia that Paul later said he persecuted. It was a Kingdom ecclesia; nothing had been said yet about the One Body of Christ. I will have more on this when we come to a discussion of Acts 2:47.

THE SEQUENCE OF EVENTS

Kingdom Anticipation

"And I appoint unto you a kingdom, as My Father hath appointed unto Me; that ye may eat and drink at My table in My kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel" (Luke 22:29-30).

Then the crucifixion, and there even the dying thief expected the Lord to be soon in the promised Kingdom (Luke 23:42). There also He made His great intercessory prayer in verse 34.

Next came His resurrection and His talk with the ten. "Then opened He their understanding, that they might understand the Scriptures"--that is, the Old Testament Scriptures (Luke 24:45).

"And said unto them, Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: And that repentance and remission of sins (part of the Kingdom gospel--Mark 1:4, Luke 3:3, Acts 2:38) should be preached in His name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem" (Luke 24:46-48).

The Immediate Program Outlined

The subject still the earthly Kingdom. No mention of any change, or any new program. Any notion that "the Lord is here founding His church," as the fundamentalists tell us, has to be read into the text. Now their next orders:

"And behold, I send the promise of the Father upon you: but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high" (Luke 24:49).

Remember, everything must be fulfilled according to the O. T. prophecies (Luke 24:44). Nothing here about any new thing, nothing about the "hidden wisdom," or the "mystery" in Paul's Epistles that was "hidden from past ages." From here on into Acts we are in fulfilled prophecy, in the prophetic program for Israel's promised Kingdom.

Remember also that these eleven Apostles are enlightened men. He had "opened their understanding" that they might understand the Old Testament Scriptures, but they knew nothing at all about the One Body mystery. It had not yet been revealed. They were also to be "witnesses"--witnesses of His resurrection, for the resurrection was the biggest proof that He was the King and Messiah of Israel. The O. T. prophets saw Him reigning in resurrection. The Apostles did bear witness to His resurrection over and over in Acts.

On Into Acts Chapter 1

Luke indicates that in Acts he is continuing right on from his "former treatise," the Gospel of Luke. The risen Lord had been with them forty days, "speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God." He has commanded them to stay in Jerusalem for the promised power--the Holy Spirit.

"When they therefore were come together, they asked of Him, saying, Lord, wilt Thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel" (Acts 1:6).

It was the natural and logical question. I have emphasized the word "therefore," because it definitely links their question with the fact that He had "opened their understanding" of the Scriptures, and also had been teaching them on the subject of the Kingdom for forty days. There was no question that the Kingdom would be offered; it was a matter of when--"at this time?"

The Lord did not rebuke them for the question, nor did He deny the fact that the Kingdom would be offered. But He could not answer in the affirmative, because He knew that Israel would reject the offer. Neither could he answer in the negative, for that would have discouraged them, and would have made a farce of the Kingdom offer.

But there is another reason. He knew that God would raise up the Apostle Paul, and as Israel steadily rejected the Kingdom offer, the great truth of the mystery, the One Body of Christ, would be revealed. But to have told the Apostles this at that time, would have been to reveal the hidden "secret" before its time. In infinite wisdom, our Lord answered that it was not for them to know the times or the seasons "which the Father hath put in His power." This answer could not truthfully have been made AFTER the Church mystery was revealed (I Thess. 5:1-2).

The Built-in Outline of Acts

The Book of Acts has its own built-in outline, and it is also the past and future outline of the coming in of the Kingdom. The outline is in Acts 1:8:

"But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto Me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth."

First, this is the outline of Acts, which we can diagram like this:

1. To Jerusalem--carried out in chapters 2 to 7.
2. To Judaea and Samaria--carried out in chapters 8 to 12.
3. To the uttermost parts of the earth--chapters 13 to 28.

Second, this is the outline, not for the church, but for the Kingdom. The Lord had said in Luke 24:47, "Beginning at Jerusalem." Always the Jewish center. The Gentile center became Antioch in Syria.

There are three stages. First Jerusalem must hear the Word and receive the King and the Kingdom, then the next circle, Judaea and Samaria, and finally the so-called Great Commission circle, the outermost parts of the earth. The Kingdom offer went out through the Acts period in this order, but Jerusalem first spurned the offer, then the other circles in their turn, and the whole Kingdom program "bogged down" from the start.

The Tribulation Remnant will again begin at Jerusalem and then Judaea and Samaria, and finally to all nations of the earth--Matthew 24:14.

His Ascension and Return

"While they beheld, He was taken up; and a cloud received Him out of their sight." Then they were told that "this same Jesus" shall return in like manner as He went up. This does not speak of the rapture, which was a mystery until revealed by the Apostle Paul (I Cor. 15:51). But He went up in a cloud, and He will return in clouds, and every eye shall see Him when He returns to set up His Kingdom (Luke 21:27, Rev. 1:7).

Kingdom Offer Proved by Choice of Matthias

In Acts 1:15-26 Matthias is chosen to take the place of Judas. This was not a mistake, as some claim, but was a necessary step taken by these enlightened men, guided by the Holy Spirit and by Scriptures. (I covered this point more fully in my answer to Dr. DeHaan, and reprints are available).

According to the Lord's promise to them in Matt. 19:28 and Luke 22:30, there had to be twelve, not eleven, Apostles to stand up on the day of Pentecost, ready to sit upon their twelve thrones should the Kingdom be brought in. The time had come, as in the parable in Matt. 22:4, "all things are ready."

This is conclusive proof that the Kingdom, not the Church, was about to be offered. For how could it possibly matter to the Church, whether there were eleven Apostles or twelve Apostles? But twelve is Israel's number. And when the Kingdom finally does come, there will be twelve Apostles, including Matthias.

The Day of Pentecost

We come now to Acts two, with the day of Pentecost and all of its mighty demonstrations of power. The word Pentecost means fifty, from the prophetic type in the Feast of the Wave Loaves in Leviticus 23:15-21, which typified the coming of the Holy Spirit fifty days after the resurrection of Christ.

The two wave loaves probably speak of the "house of Israel" and the "house of Judah" with whom the New Covenant was to be made (Jer. 31:31, Ezek. 37:16-17), and reiterated by Peter in Acts 2:14 and 22. To say that the two wave loaves "typify the church," and speak of the Jew and Gentile in the One Body, is another wild guess, based upon Scofield's words rather than upon God's words!

The Scofield note on Leviticus 23:16 about the feast of Pentecost, says: "The anti-type is the descent of the Holy Spirit to form the Church." Again, this note is tragically misleading. It is a gratuitous statement, for which Dr. Scofield could never have found a chapter and verse Scripture to back it up if his life depended upon it!

The Kingdom program and the One Body program have several things in common. Both depend upon the precious blood of Christ on the cross. Both depend upon the resurrection of Christ. Both depend upon the advent of the Holy Spirit, and both depend upon the new birth--John 3:3 and II Cor. 5:17. But there are differences, and here is one of them:

The One Body program needed the advent of the Spirit, but it did NOT need the day of Pentecost. God could have sent the Holy Spirit in some other way, and at some other time, as far as the Church was concerned. But the Kingdom program not only needed the advent of the Spirit, it also needed the day of Pentecost, with its signs and demonstration of power. The Old Testament prophecies regarding the Kingdom all had to be fulfilled in every detail.

So then, although the advent of the Spirit on Pentecost made it possible for the formation of the One Body of Christ later, it is a mistake to say, as the Scofield note does, that the purpose of the descent of the Spirit was "to form the Church." To say the least, this was not its primary purpose, if the inspired record in the Old Testament means anything at all. For all the O. T. prophecies--such as Isaiah 44:3, Ezekiel 36:26-27, 37:14 and Joel 2:28-29--cry out loud and clear that the primary purpose of the advent of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost was to make possible the coming in of the Kingdom program for Israel. May God open our eyes, and give us grace to listen to HIS words instead of the words of men!

The Speaking in Tongues

Speaking in tongues occurred three times in Acts--in 2:4, 10:45-46 and 19:1-6. Each time it was a sign, or token to JEWS that the indwelling of the Spirit as promised by the prophets, had come to pass.

There was the great amazement at the speaking in tongues, and in verse 14 Peter addressed them as "Ye men of Judaea, and all that dwell at Jerusalem." Then he quotes Joel 2:28-32. We now know that only part of Joel's prophecy was fulfilled during the Acts period. What interrupted the complete fulfillment? You remember that the whole Kingdom program was to begin at Jerusalem, and then go on to succeeding circles. All hinged upon what Jerusalem would do about the offer first. And what did Jerusalem do? Acts 8:1 will give us the answer. They had just stoned Stephen, God's last messenger to the apostate nation, and now it says, "And at that time there was a great persecution against the assembly which was at Jerusalem." Not only was there an interruption of the fulfillment of Joel's prophecy, but as we proceed through Acts, I think every careful reader gets the impression of a growing interruption in the whole Kingdom program, culminating in Acts 28:28, where the interruption is complete, until after the Church is gone.

Christ's Kingship Proved by Resurrection

In Acts 2:22, Peter addresses them as "Ye men of Israel," and says, "Jesus of Nazareth, a Man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs." The Jews require a sign, and Peter's statement tells us once more that the program of signs and miracles, both in the ministry of our Lord and of His Apostles, was to be the credentials of the Messiah-King. In verse 23 Peter lays the crime of the crucifixion directly at their feet--"ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain." But his next word is, "Whom God hath raised up," because it was not possible that He should be held by death.

The Scofield sub-head above verse 25 correctly reads, "David foretold Messiah's kingship after resurrection." From verses 22 to 36, Peter proved from the Psalms that the crucified King would arise in resurrection, and that God had promised David that "He would raise up Christ to sit on his (David's) throne." Peter is averring that the true King of Israel did come, and that He did arise from the dead, and that God has made Him both Lord and Messiah. Peter's words are also words of accusation against them--"that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified."

What To Do About It

Many in Israel, when they heard this, were pricked in their hearts, and asked, "What shall we do?" (That is, about the crucifixion). Peter answered, "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost." (This is still the Kingdom gospel--Mark 1:4).

"Then they that gladly received his (Peter's) word WERE baptized: and the same day there were added unto them (to the original 120) about three thousand souls." There is not a word so far about the One Body of which Paul speaks, nor of anybody being added to it. Nor is there the slightest hint that the Kingdom program has suddenly changed into the One Body program. All such thought has to be read into the text.

These new converts were all Kingdom converts. In verse 44 and 45 they "had all things common" and sold their goods and shared with others in need in accordance with Luke 6:30. This order, of each selling all his goods and having all things in common will be the order of the Kingdom.

If you will read again the account of the rich young ruler in Luke 18:18-24, you will see this to be true. The rich young man was to "sell all that thou hast, and distribute unto the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, follow Me." But he went away sorrowful, for he was very rich. When the Lord Jesus saw this, He said, "How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God!" Remember, that is Luke's term for the millennial Kingdom.

So, as we see here and in Acts 4:33-35, great grace was upon them; the Kingdom believers were exercised by the Holy Spirit to carry out these first principles of the Kingdom. But we have another contrast here between the Kingdom program and the Grace program for today. Under the Kingdom order, each one owning excess wealth is to sell it all and distribute to those in need. But under the Grace order for today, the order of giving is every man according to his ability, or "according to that a man hath" and "according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give" (II Cor. 8:12, 9:7).

But by the time we get to Acts chapter eleven we find the beginning of a dispensational change in this transitional Book. "The disciples, every man according to his ability, determined to send relief unto the brethren which dwelt in Judaea" (Acts 11:29). Thus by mid-Acts we see the Kingdom program waning, and the Grace program coming more and more into view.

That Tricky Statement in Our King James Bible

"And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved" (Acts 2:47).

This last verse in Acts chapter two probably threw all of us off more than any other statement in our English New Testament. That is because of our King James translation, which is more of a commentary than a translation.

We all assumed, without thinking to question the matter, that "the church" here was the Church which is the One Body of Christ of Paul's Epistles. And of course, the Scofield notes and the traditions of christendom didn't help any. We have it on our dispensational charts--"The Birth of the Church"--and in our minds and in our teachings. (Though you may have noticed an exception in the little diagram for my "Things that Differ" articles).

This mistaken assumption was the backbone of the introduction in my little Church booklet, and the main reason why I could not continue to publish it without some revisions. By the grace of God I can say with Paul that what I did, I did in ignorance. But now I know better, and can no longer plead ignorance.

With me, this is not a sort of high school debate. It would have been vastly easier for me to ignore my mistake and continue on publishing the little booklet, error and all. But I have not many more years of service to my Lord, and then I must stand before Him, and give account for all that I have done and taught--Mark 6:30. I want, above all things else, to be right before the Lord. I would rather be wrong now, before men, than be wrong then, before Him!

The Facts About Acts 2:47

1. In this whole second chapter, there is no mention whatever of the Church which is the One Body of Christ.

2. Even if the Greek word ecclesia were used in this place, it would have to refer to the local Jerusalem assembly and not to the One Body church.

3. I think I have shown abundant evidence that the Jerusalem assembly was a Kingdom ecclesia, but even if this evidence is unconvincing, there is no evidence at all in the chapter that the One Body was beginning here.

4. In some of the best manuscripts, even the Greek word ecclesia is not found in Acts 2:47, and the term "the church" is absent from all, or nearly all other versions. Here are some of them:

Darby Version--"And the Lord added to the assembly daily those that were to be saved."

1901 Revised--"And the Lord added to them day by day those that were saved."

Grant's Numerical Bible--"And day by day the Lord added together those being saved."

Rotherham Emphasized N. T.--"And the Lord was adding them who were being saved daily together."

Williams Version--"And every day the Lord continued to add to them the people who were being saved."

Amplified N. T.--"And the Lord kept adding to their number daily those who were being saved."

In Acts Chapter Three

Acts chapter three opens with Peter and John in the temple, "at the hour of prayer." If this is Church ground, and these are "Christian Apostles," then what are they doing in the Jewish temple at the hour of prayer?

We are told by the fundamentalists that Israel was set aside, and the Kingdom offer terminated, at Matthew 23:38, when the Lord said, "Behold, your house is left unto you desolate."

If this be so, what are these enlightened, Spirit-filled Apostles doing in this same temple, at the customary time of prayers? And why did the converts in chapter 2:46 continue meeting, with one accord, in the temple? Why did they not cut loose from Judaism and the temple, and start a Christian work?

The answer is that Israel had not yet been set aside, and the temple was still God's appointed house of prayer--Isaiah 56:7. The temple would be desolate, but not till A.D. 70, as we now know.

While in the temple, the Apostles heal the lame man, showing that the credentials of the King (Isaiah 35:6), and the gospel of the Kingdom, with its accompanying signs and miracles (Matt. 9:35, 10:7-8), was still valid.

Peter's Kingdom Appeal

From 3:12 on, Peter addresses the crowd in the temple, telling them that the God of their fathers had glorified His Servant (R.V.) Jesus whom they had denied and killed. He then reiterated the words of the Lord Jesus on the cross:

"And now, brethren, I wot that through ignorance ye did it, as did also your rulers. But those things, which God before had shewed by the mouth of all His prophets, that Christ should suffer, He hath so fulfilled.

"Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord; And He shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you: Whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began" (Acts 3:17-21).

How can anyone read the above words with an open mind without seeing the renewed Kingdom offer, as plain as words could make it? To the credit of the Scofield editors, even they acknowledge here that the "times of refreshing" are "seasons in which, through the appearance of the Messiah in His kingdom, there shall occur blessed rest and refreshment for the people of God."

Peter is telling the Jews in the temple what he told the Jews in the city, that they are guilty of the crime of the crucifixion, but adds that they did it in ignorance, implying the Lord's gracious prayer for them on the cross. He is telling them that it is not yet too late for them. If they will repent of the crucifixion crime and turn again to the Lord, they shall have remission of their sins (blotted out), and even at this late hour God will send back to them His Son, their risen Messiah, who must remain up in heaven until the time of restitution, or restoration, i.e., the millennial Kingdom.

What About the Rest of Acts?

There is untold blessing for us, once we lay hold upon the fact that Acts is a transitional book, the link between the Kingdom program in the Gospels and the One Body program in the Epistles of Paul. It is therefore a record of change. It begins with the Jews and the Kingdom in prominence, and ends with the Gentiles and the Church in prominence.

The early chapters of Acts are "unto the Jews only" (11:19), and then it is "to the Jew first" (13:46), and finally "to the Jew first, and also to the Gentile" (Rom. 1:16, Acts 26:20). Peter's ministry occupies the first twelve chapters, which are predominantly given to the gradual rejection of the Kingdom offer by Jerusalem and the homeland of Israel. Paul's ministry fills the last sixteen chapters, which predominantly record (1) the gradual rejection of the risen Messiah by the dispersed Jews in the outlying countries, ending at Rome, and (2) Paul's ministry to the Gentiles.

Kingdom Offer to the End of Acts

The Kingdom offer continues on to the end of Acts, even though the Church which is the One Body of Christ appears on the scene, with the great revelations through the Apostle Paul. But the discerning reader will easily detect the growing rebellion against the risen Messiah on the part of the people of Israel, and a corresponding diminishing of Kingdom emphasis on God's part, along with a gradual turning, more and more, to the Gentiles. See Acts 13:46 and 18:6.

Two things in particular, however, show that God is still hovering over His earthly, covenant people throughout Acts, and that the Kingdom offer lingers in the background clear up to Acts 28:28. These are:

1. "To the Jew first" is the order all the way through Acts.
2. Signs and miracles are still in order to the end of Acts.

"To the Jew first"--I know of only one substantial reason why the Jew should be first in God's consideration whenever the Kingdom is in view. Surely it is not because the Jew is in any way better than the Gentile. It is because from the Abrahamic covenant on, God had purposed to use Israel as His instrument to reach the lost, Gentile nations. That is why, up to the present age of grace, any Gentiles who came to God had to do so through His people Israel. And that will be the order again after the church is raptured out. When the "Great Commission" comes into its own in the Tribulation time, Jewish servants will go out and be what God has wanted all the time--an obedient Israel to go to the Gentile nations. But everything has depended upon Israel's repentance and turning about. It was therefore necessary that the Kingdom offer go to the Jew first.

Not only is the "Jew first" order all the way through Acts, it also affects Paul's early, or pre-prison Church Epistles, i.e., the Epistles written during the Acts period. It was still the order of things when Paul wrote his Epistle to the Romans, as may be seen in Romans 1:16. Same for the tongues and healings in I Corinthians. But the "Jew first" order ended at Acts 28:28. It is never found in the later, or prison Epistles.

Although the Apostle Paul was chosen to be the Apostle to the Gentiles, this was not so exclusively. We read in Acts 9:15, "But the Lord said unto him (Ananias), Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto Me, to bear My name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel."

Paul, then, did have a ministry to the nation Israel, and I think he fulfilled this charge every time he taught in a Jewish synagogue. In any case, his ministry was "to the Jew first" all the way to the end of Acts. In all his missionary trips he always went, first of all, to the Jewish synagogue. His heart yearned for his kinsmen according to the flesh.

Indeed, it seems clear that he only went to the Gentiles when circumstances constrained him to do so. When his fellow Jews spurned his message and the Gentiles received it. God wanted the message of the risen Messiah to be spread to the farthest colony of dispersed Jews. Acts closes with Paul at Rome, and true to his "Jew first" pattern, the first thing he did upon arrival there was to call "the chief of the Jews together" and talk to them not about the Church which is the One Body, but about "the hope of Israel" (Acts 28:17-20).

Signs and Miracles--We know, of course, that signs and miracles belong to Israel because "the Jews require a sign." But there is more to it than that. Isaiah 35 is a chapter which the Scofield editors correctly label "Kingdom blessing: the regathering of Israel." Verses 4-6 show the various bodily healings to be the credentials of the King, by which Israel should know Him when He comes.

These credentials--healings and other signs--were definitely identified with the Kingdom gospel (Matthew 9:35, 10:7-8). Again, in Mark 16:17-18, where we have the so-called Great Commission--a continuation of the Kingdom gospel--we read that certain signs would follow them that believe. In His name they would

cast out demons, speak in tongues, take up serpents or drink poison, and heal the sick. In the Acts period they did cast out demons (Acts 16:18); they did heal people, and they did speak in tongues (I Cor. 14:13-19). In fact, Paul spoke in tongues "more than ye all," and he once took up a deadly serpent.

So the Kingdom signs and miracles continued clear through Acts. We find Paul still performing them at Ephesus in 19:11-12, where God "wrought special miracles by the hands of Paul," even to sending out blessed handkerchiefs. He even healed a man in the very last chapter--28:8. But even Paul could not heal anyone after Acts 28:28; there are no healings in the prison Epistles.

WHY, then, were there all these miracles before Acts 28:28, but none after that, and no such things for today? Some explain it by various arguments, some of which may be plausible. But the big, underlying reason is a dispensational one--that Israel was not completely set aside until Acts 28:28, and that the Kingdom offer lingered until then, even though the One Body had come in.

The Great Climax of the Acts Period

We now come to the great climax of the Book of Acts, the great turning point, and this will not only be easily seen, but will thrill us, once we come to see that Acts is not so much a history of the emergence of the Church as it is a history of the gradual rejection of the Kingdom offer by Israel.

"Be it known therefore unto you, that the salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles, and that they will hear it" (Acts 28:28).

God's patience with the rebellious nation has come to an end. He has fulfilled His obligation to them, in answer to that prayer of His dying Son on the cross. No more, until after the Church dispensation, will He plead with them by the words of the prophets and by signs and miracles. And no more will the full message of grace in Paul's Epistles be encumbered by things having to do with "the hope of Israel."

Through the Holy Spirit Paul has invoked the final indictment of Isaiah 6:10 upon them. It is the end of all that is Jewish--signs ordinances, water baptism for remission of sins, and soon even their beloved city and the temple itself. Please compare these two Scriptures:

"And when they (the Jews) had appointed him a day, there came many to him into his lodging; to whom he expounded and testified the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus, both out of the law of Moses, and out of the prophets, from morning till evening" (Acts 28:23).

"And Paul dwelt two whole years in his own hired house, and received all that came in unto him, Preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ, with all confidence, no man forbidding him" (Acts 28:31).

These two Scriptures stand out in amazing contrast, with the 28th verse in between. The first one is the Kingdom side of the picture, and the other is the grace side. As Paul stood at the bridge, ready to cross over from verse 23 to verse 31, he must have been like a man standing at the border between two countries. Looking back over the terrain from which he has come, he sees back there "the kingdom of God," and with it "the hope of Israel" (v. 20). He sees also "Jesus," the name by which He was known to the Jews, and used some thirty times in Acts. (It is only used this way twice in all the prison Epistles).

How often, too, he had stood in their synagogues teaching them of the risen Messiah from the prophecies of Moses and the prophets. Among the Jews, as he had told Agrippa, he spoke "none other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come" (26:22).

But now, as he stands at the bridge of Acts 28:28 and looks ahead, he sees the "kingdom of God" still, but far off now in the distance. And more immediately, the great revelations of the grace of God, in which it will be no more "this same Jesus," but His full Lordship as "the Lord Jesus Christ."

And this has been the test of this whole present age, on which side of the bridge they will stand. As each chapter in II Timothy shows, the great apostasy of this age began even during Paul's lifetime, in a departure from Paul's revelations, given him by the risen Lord. Most in christendom to this day stand on the Kingdom, or "Jesus" side of the bridge. Shall we stand there too, brethren, or shall we cross the bridge with Paul?

Once we cross the bridge with Paul, we will no longer try to mix up the Church with Israel, and we will no longer feel we have to compromise and water down the great truths of "the mystery" (literally God's sacred secret) which were hidden from past generations and revealed to us through Paul's revelations.

Recently I received a letter from a brother who is being asked questions that he cannot truthfully answer apart from the truth of the Kingdom offer in Acts. He wrote: "I long for the day when, and if, we can with all liberty teach the whole truth as the grace of our God enables us. I find my ministry suffers because of the feeling of restraint this controversy engenders."

I know what he means, and I, too, feel this lack of liberty. I especially long to have my pen hand untied, so that I can proclaim the whole truth of God in my writing ministry before my few remaining active years run out. I am quite sure of two things: (1) that every one of you brethren will one day see these truths about Acts as a transitional book, even though it may come too late for some of us; and (2) that when you do see them, it will give your ministry a new fragrance and a new emphasis, because God will bless and lead you on.

In spite of this urgency, however, I am not pushing for any immediate action. I hope that each one of you will take this paper home, take another year to study it carefully, and above all, pray for grace to be taught of the Lord.

Before closing, I would like to briefly discuss a few questions or comments that may be pertinent to our subject.

When DID The Church Begin?

In God's mind it began before the foundation of the earth. But if God did not choose to tell us exactly when the One Body began historically, He must have a reason for it, and I don't feel that we are obligated to try to force a historic date into the Word. A brother who is now home with the Lord used to say, "The Church came in as a mystery, and it will go out as a mystery; no one knows when it came in, and no one knows when it will go out."

I think we are safe in saying that the One Body began with Paul, or more specifically, with Paul's revelations. I am sure that if God had wanted us to know more than that, He could easily have said so.

Could the Church Have Begun Secretly at Pentecost?

Some believe this, that the Church did begin at Pentecost, but only God knew it. Admittedly, this could be a possibility, although I don't think it could be proved from the Word. Certainly, if the new converts on the day of Pentecost were members of the One Body, they didn't know it, and neither did the Apostles. However, I wouldn't fight this belief so long as it is advanced merely as a theory or a possibility, and not claimed as a Bible-taught fact. What I am objecting to is reading things into the inspired record that the inspired record doesn't say, like saying that Acts 2:47 says the One Body began at Pentecost, when it says no such thing.

Could the Church Be Part of the Millennial Kingdom?

It is my understanding, subject to more light from the Word, that the Church will be with her Lord in the heavenlies (Eph. 2:6), while redeemed Israel will be God's administrator of things on earth during the millennial Kingdom. I believe there is a strong possibility that along with our Lord, we will have access often to the earthly realm.

Actually, I believe Scripture sees something ahead that is bigger than either the Church or Israel, "the dispensation of the fulness of times" when God will "gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth: even in Him" (Eph. 1:10).

Will There Be a Third Offer of the Kingdom?

I think a careful reading of the Acts record will reveal a definite interruption, as in the case of Joel's prophecy in Acts two. The Tribulation remnant will take up where the twelve left off, and the second offer will go on again, and succeed.

Did Paul Preach the Kingdom Offer?

Perhaps a little more information on the Kingdom will help. Israel was guaranteed the Kingdom under two special covenants. They are:

1. The Davidic Covenant (II Sam. 7:9-17, Luke 1:32) which has to do with Israel nationally and governmentally.
2. The New Covenant (Jer. 31:31-33, Ezek. 36:24-31) under which Kingdom believers must be born again. This covenant was ratified at Calvary by the blood of Christ. It is what Nicodemus should have remembered.

I am not ready to be too dogmatic on this, but I can't imagine Paul preaching any other thing in those Jewish synagogues than the New Covenant. It would have been the wrong place and time to preach the joint body, the "mystery" truth. (That would have been the message afterward, when Jews and Gentiles were gathered into a Christian assembly).

We are told in Acts 19:8 that Paul went into the synagogue, and there he preached "the kingdom of God." Moreover, if he is, as we believe, the author of Hebrews, he certainly knew how to preach the New Covenant to the Jewish people. Further, in a Jewish context in II Cor. 3:6, Paul said he was a minister of the New Covenant, a statement that must go with tongues and healings, etc., and would be out of place in the prison Epistles, after the Kingdom offer had ceased.

What About Ephesians 2:20?

"And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets."

The first question is what apostles and what prophets? I think Eph. 3:5 rules out the Old Testament prophets, the "mystery" that is "NOW revealed unto His holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit." This leaves us with New Testament apostles and prophets. One thing we know about the twelve circumcision Apostles is that, according to the Lord's promise, they are going to be in the millennial Kingdom and sit upon their twelve thrones. So if they are in the foundation of the One Body, how do they finally wind up in the Kingdom?

We probably will never know all the questions on this subject, let alone all the answers. Personally, I believe all the people saved in the early part of Acts, including the Apostles, did become members of the One Body Church when it came in. I also think God will be perfectly able to straighten it all out at the rapture.

But I think Mr. Grant comes near to the real truth when he says, in his Numerical Bible, "The apostles and prophets were not in the foundation; they laid the foundation." Or to go a little farther, we believers are built upon the same foundation that the N. T. apostles and prophets were built upon--the foundation of the apostles and prophets, which is Jesus Christ.

From the Pen of C. H. Mackintosh

Martin Luther, in his debate with the Catholic cardinals, quoted often from the Augustinian Fathers. This, he said, was not to add any authority to the holy Scriptures, "But to remove our cause from the stigma of novelty."

C. H. Mackintosh was one of the early brethren of Darby's day. Although he seems to have believed that the One Body began at Pentecost, he believed that primarily the early chapters of Acts were the renewed offer of the Kingdom to Israel. He is the beloved "C.H.M." whose six books on the Pentateuch we enjoy so much, and also the many precious chapters in his Miscellaneous Writings. I would commend to all of you his Miscellaneous Writings, Volume 5, last chapter, from which I quote the following excerpts:

On Acts 3:19--"Agreeably to this, the apostle Peter, in his address to Israel, offers them the kingdom." "Repent ye, therefore, and be converted . ." "In a word, it was still the kingdom and not the great mystery of the church. Those who think that the opening chapters of Acts present the church in its highest aspect have, by no means, reached the divine thought on the subject."

On Acts 10--"We infer, therefore, that the preaching of the gospel to the Gentiles by the mouth of Peter was not the development of the great mystery of the church, but simply the opening of the kingdom, . ." "Mark, it is 'the kingdom,' and not the church. Peter received the keys of the kingdom, and he used those keys, first to open the kingdom to the Jew, and then to the Gentile. But Peter never received a commission to unfold the mystery of the church. Even in his epistles we find nothing of 'the mystery'."

On Acts 28:28--"There was now no more hope. Every effort that love could make had been made, but to no purpose . ." "his affectionate heart led him to delay as long as possible ere he would reiterate the prophet's verdict" (of Isaiah 6:10) . . "he must therefore set himself to bring out that holy and heavenly mystery which had been hid in God, from ages and generations--the mystery of the church as the body of Christ."

On Eph. 2:6--"He hath raised us up together, and made us to sit in heavenly places in Christ Jesus"--"Believers did not know this at the first; it was not unfolded by the ministry of the twelve, as seen in the Acts of the Apostles, because the testimony of Israel was still going on, and so long as earth was the manifested scene of divine operation, and so long as there was any ground of hope in connection with Israel, the heavenly mystery was held back."

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