

## Was the kingdom offered to Israel after Calvary?

The Gospels inform us that Israel rejected its Messiah and His kingdom which He offered to it on the basis of righteousness and repentance. They cast the Son and Heir out of the vineyard and killed Him (Mk 12). “We [the nation] will not have this man to reign over us” (Lk 19:14). At Calvary, God set aside the nation in judgment, because it delivered up and crucified the Holy One and the Just (Acts 3:14). The nation stood indicted, in that “all the house of Israel” was to know assuredly that God hath made that same Jesus, whom it crucified, both Lord and Christ (Acts 2:36). The Church, which began at Pentecost is now the object of divine grace and blessing. Jew and Gentile share the one new hope as the one new man in Christ. In a future day when the Church period has run its course (the fullness of the Gentiles), God will take up Israel and install the covenanted kingdom. Although many share this view, it is held by some that God offered the kingdom to the nation after Calvary – the offer even extending up to the point of the martyrdom of Stephen. To support this claim, several passages from the book of Acts are drawn upon. “But what saith the Scriptures?”

### **The nature of the offer**

Calvary was the great terminus of the Old Covenant ordained by God through Moses. Any offer of the kingdom to Israel after Calvary therefore has to be a *new* offer involving a *new* order between God and His people – a new covenant. The coming of this new order was foretold by the Lord before Calvary. “And He said unto them, this is my blood of the new testament [covenant], which is shed for many” (Mark 14:24). It was at Calvary that this New Covenant was forged. Precious and efficacious blood was shed, the veil was rent, the middle wall broken down and an end made of the law of commandments. There is to be a weekly commemoration of it in the observance of it the Lord’s Supper, which was instituted by the Mediator of the New Covenant. Christ is that Mediator by means of His death (Heb 9:15).

This new offer must then be a theocratic kingdom in which Christ is enthroned on earth, with Israel repentant and fully accepting Him as their Messiah-King. In the light of Scripture, such a kingdom was not and could not be the object of an offer to Israel after Calvary. Though some preconditions were met, such as the rending of the veil, Israel as even the prophets declared, remained unrepentant and rebellious. The deep lament of their Messiah anticipated the reality of it. “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!” (Matt 23:37).

There are a number of things that confirm the unequivocal withdrawal of the kingdom after Calvary – one being the Lord’s Supper noted above. It was not a commemoration given to a penitent Israel unto a King on earth, but given to the new man in memorial of a risen Head in heaven. It was

to be observed by a redeemed people during His *absence*. This is emphatically communicated in that it was to be kept “until He come” and, in that it was to be observed in “remembrance” of Him. “And He took bread, and gave thanks, and brake it, and gave unto them, saying, this is my body which is given for you: this do in remembrance of me” (Luke 22:19). The commemorative object of the Supper is an absent, ascended and glorified Christ, never one of Christ present and enthroned on earth.

### **Why is this matter important?**

This matter may at first sight appear insignificant. However, as we examine the passages employed to support another offer of the kingdom to Israel, it will become apparent that our conclusion has a significant bearing on the doctrine of the Church and dispensational teaching. These strands of truth are fitly framed with others to compose the inspired Canon of Scripture. “But the word of the LORD was unto them precept upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little” (Isa 28:13). The perceptive reader will also recognize that the conclusion will impact upon the interpretation of biblical prophecy, the seventy weeks of Daniel 9 being a case in point. There is on the one hand what Daniel was given to see – a series of unbroken times and seasons which relate specifically to Israel. On the other hand, there is that which was not revealed to Daniel – the Church period in parenthesis between the 69<sup>th</sup> and 70<sup>th</sup> week.<sup>1</sup>

With this in view let us examine the passages of scripture that are used to support an offer of the kingdom to Israel after Calvary.

### **Acts 1:6. “When they therefore were come together, they asked of Him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?”**

“And, being assembled together with them, commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, saith he, ye have heard of me. For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence. When they therefore were come together, they asked of him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel? And he said unto them, it is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power. 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” (Acts 1:4–8).

At the time of this assembling, Calvary and the resurrection of Christ had just occurred. The Feast of Pentecost was nigh. The Lord speaks of a new and imminent dispensation associated with the promise of the Father. It was to begin at Pentecost. He then draws a contrast between two baptisms that distinguishes the new dispensation from that which was past – the baptism of John and the

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<sup>1</sup> If Daniel 9 foreshadows Christ as the Messiah, which it in fact does, then this memorial feast which is to be observed in absentia, is of itself indicative of a “gap” in the 70 week prophecy.

baptism of the Holy Spirit. John's baptism was a *national* baptism associated with Israel. It called upon every Israelite to repent in the light of the coming Messiah and His kingdom (Acts 13:24). The nation rejected Him and His kingdom. John's baptism was no more. We have confirmation of it in the Lord's words, "but ye" [not Israel] shall be baptised with the Holy Ghost not many days hence." This contrast (along with the Lord's Supper) anticipates the beginning of the Church at Pentecost and, it provides a clear intimation that Israel as a nation was at *that* time set aside by God.

The disciples' question about restoring the kingdom to Israel reveals that they, like many of their brethren, were still preoccupied with a Jewish hope, one that was earthly and national. He who was once dead was now alive. Because of this their hope of the kingdom being restored under Christ as King was revived. Beyond this hope they could not go, being characteristically slow of learning in regard to "the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow" (1 Pet 1:11). They had not understood the new and heavenly hope in Christ and His resurrection, let alone appreciate the glory vested in His imminent ascension and exaltation. They, like Mary on that resurrection morn had to learn that "Wherefore henceforth know we no man after the flesh: yea, though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we him no more" (2 Cor 5:16)

The disciples' expectation of a restored kingdom was not wrong – it was their sense of timing that was astray. It is *this* that the Lord addresses, taking care not to deny the truth of the restoration of Israel under a *future* theocratic kingdom on earth: it was the grand hope heralded by the OT prophets. And so He said unto them, "It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in His own power" (Acts 1:7). For *them* as the sons of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, all national hope and glory under the Messiah was set aside. They were to focus on that which was imminent – the coming of the Spirit of God and the Church in which there is neither Jew nor Gentile; the coming one new man having one new hope.

One further observation is needed regarding the Lord's post resurrection commission in Matthew 28. It unambiguously anticipated the coming of the Church and the setting aside of Israel as a nation. "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost" (Matt 28:19). This is wholly consistent with the universal commission given by the risen Christ in Acts 1 (of which the tongues at Pentecost were a sign). "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" (Acts 1:8). How different to the Lord's commission before Calvary, when the kingdom was being offered to Israel! "These twelve Jesus sent forth, and commanded them, saying, go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not. But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matt 10:5-6).

We have then a post resurrection *commemoration* and *commission* which are incompatible with an offer of the theocratic kingdom to Israel after Calvary.

**Acts 3:19. “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.”**

“The God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob, the God of our fathers, hath glorified his Son Jesus; whom ye delivered up, and denied him in the presence of Pilate, when he was determined to let him go. But ye denied the Holy One and the Just, and desired a murderer to be granted unto you; And killed the Prince of life, whom God hath raised from the dead; whereof we are witnesses. And his name through faith in his name hath made this man strong, whom ye see and know: yea, the faith which is by him hath given him this perfect soundness in the presence of you all. 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 3:13–21).

There is nothing in this passage to suggest that the repentance called for is in regard to an offer of the kingdom to Israel. On this occasion Peter addresses the Jews nationally as “ye men of Israel.” They were bewildered over the miracle the disciples performed on the lame man. Peter sought to identify and explain the new ground upon which this miracle was performed. It was on the ground of a once crucified but now risen and glorified Son of God, whom they rejected. Peter further explains that His coming and suffering was foretold by the OT prophets. So now, in the light of this he exhorts them to repent and be converted, that their sins be blotted out. The repentance commanded here is in regard to the forgiveness of *personal* sins and the receiving of *personal* salvation in Christ. When it is received it will enable seasons of refreshment from the Lord – His presence in their hearts and in their way. “Lo, I am with you always” (Matt 28:20).

Note too, verse 21 rules out any thought of an offer of the kingdom to Israel. It speaks of Christ’s ascension as recorded in Acts 1, and of His exaltation in heaven as noted in the epistles. “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.” That heaven [note the imperative], *must* receive Christ until the times of restitution, makes it abundantly clear that the rejected Messiah would be absent from earth for an unbroken period of time. Until that day – the times of restitution of all things, He will be seated in heaven and not enthroned on earth as Sovereign in the prophesied theocratic kingdom. That thralldom will be the Millennial Kingdom on earth, established upon Christ’s Second Advent. Then Israel will once more be the object of God’s purposes on earth, wondrously foreshadowed in the year of Jubilee.

Finally, Peter's exhortation to repent is subsequent to the message of the gospel of Christ and the water baptism to which the converted Jews submitted in Acts 2. It was the message and baptism undertaken according to the Lord's command in Matthew 28, which was unto *all* nations. The repentance here cannot therefore in any way refer to a national repentance which, as the prophets' pen informs us, is a precursor to the establishment of a theocratic kingdom of Israel on earth. This repentance must wait until a future day when the Church period has run its course and God resumes His dealings with Israel.

In addition to the post resurrection *commemoration* and *commission*, we have a post resurrection call to *conversion* and *confession*, which are also incompatible with an offer of the theocratic kingdom to Israel after Calvary.

**Acts 13:46: "Then Paul and Barnabas waxed bold, and said, It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you, but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles" (cf Acts 28:28).**

This occasion is sometimes taken to be the instance when the nation of Israel was set aside by God – implying that an offer of the kingdom was in place up to this time. Paul and Barnabas were not offering the Jews a *national* covenant blessing through Christ. They were proclaiming and exhorting *personal* salvation in Christ; that Christ had died and risen from among the dead for the justification of all men. The Jews rejected this message of salvation, which is why Paul and Barnabas turned away from them and towards the Gentiles. This message was first delivered to the Jew, because whatever their national failing, the Jews were still God's principal people. "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek" (Rom 1:16, cf Rom 2:9-10). The primacy of the Jew in regard to the *outreaching* of the Gospel is no more – it ceased when they rejected Paul and Barnabas.<sup>2</sup>

### **A definitive answer from the Epistle to the Ephesians**

Any uncertainty regarding the time or occasion when the offer of the kingdom to Israel was withdrawn, can be readily resolved by referring to Chapter 2 of the Epistle to the Ephesians.

"For He is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us; Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in

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<sup>2</sup> The two divisions in the Book of Acts reflect the divine order in outreach and commission. Christianity was to the *Jew first*, for they must first begin at Jerusalem, then evangelize Judea, Samaria and then the uttermost parts of the earth. In Chapters 1-12, the Gospel is taken to the Jews. Jerusalem is the geographical center and Peter the prime evangelist. In Chapters 13-28, the Gentile city of Antioch is the geographical center, and Paul is the prime apostle. The Gospel is taken to the Gentiles throughout Asia and to Rome.

ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace. And that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby” (Eph 2:14-16).<sup>3</sup>

### *The middle wall of partition broken down*

Consider first the middle wall of partition. What was this middle wall? When was it broken down? What is the significance of it being broken?

The temple veil of the holy of holies marked the barrier between *God* and *man*. The middle wall of partition in the outer court was the barrier between men – *Jew* and *Gentile*. No Gentile was permitted to go beyond that wall. This barrier stood as a physical demonstration of the ceremonial and positional separation between Jew and Gentile. It was a monument to the divine principle, that the Gentiles were aliens and strangers to the covenants of promise and without hope. As long as this middle wall remained, Jew and Gentile could never come before God on the same ground or share the one hope. It thus stood as an impediment to the formation of the Church, in which a new divine order was to be instituted. In the Church there is *no* distinction between Jew and Gentile before God – the *one new man* in Christ. The breaking down of this middle wall of partition was therefore a necessary condition to the Church coming into being.

When then was the middle wall of partition broken down? Paul tells us in this passage that this took place before Pentecost – at *Calvary* in fact, upon the cross. Observe the aorist tense – “having abolished,” a completed *event* at a time in the past. This abolition, like the rending of the veil was enacted upon the death of Christ.

### *The end of the law of commandments*

Christ’s death at Calvary also meant the end of the law of commandments. The law kept the uncircumcised Gentiles separate from the Jews. This separation was evident in Peter’s rooftop protest in regard to unclean things (Acts 10). It was also seen in the Lord’s early commission to His disciples which was to be confined to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. The law was abolished at Calvary and the commission upon His resurrection was broadened to include all nations. “Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost” (Matt 28:19).

However, let us not forget that the end of the law of commandments also liberated the Jew. The law restricted the Jew in his approach to God. This too was abolished – rendered null and void upon the death of Christ. The abolition of the law of commandments thus responds to the truth, that Christ

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<sup>3</sup> The expression “His flesh” here is clearly connected with the death of Christ; so too, is the parallel expression “His flesh” in Hebrews 10:20. The new and living way “which He hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, His flesh.”

“came and preached peace to you [the Gentiles] which were afar off, and to them that were nigh [the Jews]” (v 17). Christ’s death at Calvary laid the foundation for this unity and the Spirit of Christ came down at Pentecost and formed it as promised in Acts 1.

The rent veil, the broken middle wall and the end of the law of commandments severally and conjointly anticipated the *one new man in Christ*, which meant that Israel was judicially set aside at Calvary until the time of restitution of all things. It is vital to recognise that this “one new man in Christ” is not the Gentiles being brought alongside the Jew (as will be the case in the Millennial Kingdom), but Jew and Gentile welded together by the Spirit of God into one body – the Body of Christ. This is the grand mystery of which Paul spoke. “That the Gentiles should be fellowheirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel” (Eph 3:6).<sup>4</sup> And, that Gospel was commissioned upon the resurrection of Christ. In this dispensation Jew *and* Gentile are brought into a place which *neither* had. There is a new hope; an access within the veil by a new and living way, as the one new man in Christ. This is an overwhelmingly superior position to the place and privilege possessed by the Jew under the old economy.

In addition to the post resurrection commemoration, commission, the call to conversion and confession, we have upon Christ’s death, the ground laid for a new *community*– the one new man in Christ, which is also incompatible with an offer of the theocratic kingdom to Israel after Calvary. And, is not this wholly compatible with the Church age existing as an unspecified period of time between the 69<sup>th</sup> and 70<sup>th</sup> week of Daniel’s prophecy (Dan 9)? It was when the Messiah was “cut off” (Christ’s death, Dan 9:26), that God suspended His dealings with Israel as a nation and irrevocably laid the ground for the beginning of the Church at Pentecost. The setting aside of Israel, the postponement of its covenant blessing and the coming of the one new man, were all predicated on the death of Christ. They were marked by the rending of the Temple veil and the breaking down of the middle wall of partition between Jew and Gentile (Matt 27:51; Eph 2:14).

## The death of Stephen

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<sup>4</sup> When the Church has been called home, there will be a distinction between Jew and Gentile as God takes up His firstborn nation in judgment during the Tribulation. There will be a temple in that period, but one that serves the antichrist. In the Millennial Kingdom under the New Covenant, there will be a temple and a distinction between Jew and Gentile, but one that is quite different to that under the Old Covenant. Israel will attain national primacy. “And I will plant them upon their land, and they shall no more be pulled up out of their land which I have given them, saith the LORD thy God” (Amos 9:15). The nation’s blessing rests on Jehovah being *with* and *among* it. This blessing sets Israel apart among the nations. As for the Gentile nations, “they shall “take hold of the skirt of him that is a Jew, saying, we will go with you. for we have heard that God is with you” (Zech 8:23).

Is there any significance in Stephen's death in the matter of another offer of the kingdom to Israel? The idea that there is, seems to be based on the fact that it was after the stoning of Stephen by the Jews, that the Word of God was taken to the regions and nations beyond Jerusalem. This agrees with the divine intention that it was "to the Jew first." But this intention was not in regard to an offer to the "nation" of the kingdom at all. It was in regard to the taking of the Gospel of Christ that was taken to the Jew first – the offer of *personal* salvation and its blessing. The imminent fulfilment of the "promise of the Father" and the "baptism of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 1:4-5), the miraculously spoken *Gentile* tongues (Acts 2) and the beginning of the Church (Acts 2), confirms this to be so. It is true to say however that the true *character* of the Church (Jew and Gentile) was not seen until after the death of Stephen. But this is a far cry from the claim that the new dispensation did not *commence* until after the stoning of Stephen.

### Conclusion

The Old Covenant was terminated on the cross. We have today the New Covenant ratified by the death and shed blood of Christ which, for the nation of Israel will be fulfilled nationally in the Millennial Kingdom; but now, its spiritual blessings in Christ are bestowed upon the new man comprising believing Jews and Gentiles – the Church, which is His body. The death of Christ saw the abolition of the old and it became the foundation of all that is new.

"But into the second [i.e., the holy of holies] went the high priest alone once every year, not without blood, which he offered for himself, and for the errors of the people. The Holy Ghost thus signifying, that the way into the holiest of all was not yet made manifest, while as the first tabernacle was yet standing" (Heb 9:7-8).

Glorious truth! Calvary was the nightfall of things old and the radiant dawn of things new. With the veil rent, the middle wall of partition broken down and the end of the law of commandments, the first tabernacle could no longer stand. Its inner veil and middle wall were consigned to the dust of history upon the emancipating death of Christ. It will never be revived – except in the misguided hearts of those who seek refuge under the weak and beggarly elements that administered it (Gal 4:9). The presence of Christ during the Millennial Kingdom dismisses the need of an inner veil. For this reason there is no mention of such a veil by Ezekiel in his details of the millennial temple. The post resurrection commemoration, commission, call to conversion and confession and new community – the one new man in Christ, means that there never was, nor could there be an offer of the kingdom to Israel between the cross and the rapture (the close of the Church age i.e., the fullness of the Gentiles).

The truth "that the Gentiles should be fellowheirs, and of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ by the gospel" (Eph 3:6), is surely anticipated in the "whosoever will" in the gospel of Christ declared in John 3:16.



