



UNDERSTANDING THE BIBLE

LESSON 6

Memory verse: Acts 4:12

The “name” referred to in the above verse is of course that of the Lord Jesus Christ. Please memorize the above verse and be prepared to write it out at the end of this lesson.

In our last lesson we considered the various dispensations in Scripture. A dispensation, literally “house law,” is a system of management by which God governs His household.

Many Bible scholars identify seven dispensations in scripture.

INNOCENCE Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden

CONSCIENCE From the fall of man to the flood

HUMAN GOVERNMENT From Noah to Babel

PROMISE From Abraham to the giving of the Law

LAW Moses to Israel’s rejection of Christ

During the dispensation of the law, the dispensation of the Kingdom was announced and offered to Israel but was rejected.

GRACE The dispensation of the Grace of God in which we now live from the Apostle Paul to the rapture of the Body of Christ.

KINGDOM After the tribulation period and the battle of Armageddon, Christ will return to the earth a second time and establish the Kingdom.

The dispensation of Law governed Israel in the Old Testament. Under the law, Israel was meant to obey God and be a light to the nations. The scriptures show however, that the nation failed to obey and was judged by God.

As the New Testament opened, the dispensation of Law was yet in effect and Israel was the primary focus of God’s attention. In Matthew, Mark, Luke and John we see that the Messiah came to the nation of Israel. It was announced to Israel that “the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” The Messiah and his Kingdom, in which Israel would be restored and lifted up above the nations, were promises long awaited by the people of Israel. Tragically, as we saw in our study of Christ’s earthly ministry, He was rejected by them.

Moving from the four gospels into the book of Acts, the dispensation of Law continued to be in effect and Israel was still the primary nation. In the early chapters of the book of Acts, we see that even after crucifying Christ, Israel was given an opportunity to repent and receive Him. If the nation had accepted Him, then the promised Kingdom would have come. We will see however, that Israel rejected Jesus Christ for a second time.

The following comments by J. Sidlow Baxter describe events in the book of Acts:

“In the light of our findings, we affirm once again that this book, the Acts of the Apostles, is primarily an account of the renewed offer of Messiah-Jesus and the long-promised ‘kingdom of heaven’ to the nation of Israel.”

“The period covered by Acts, we repeat, was a suspense period. So long as the Kingdom was being offered to the nation, the return of the Lord could have happened without delay upon the fulfillment of the conditions...Would Israel respond, repent, receive? That was the suspense point”

(J. Sidlow Baxter, Explore the Book, Grand Rapids, Zondervan Publishing House, 1972, Vol. VI, p. 41,48.)

THE EARLY CHAPTERS OF THE BOOK OF ACTS THE MINISTRY TO THE JEWS

1. Please carefully read Acts 1-7. _____ (Check)

Luke, the writer of the third gospel account, is also the writer of the book of Acts. Acts is a continuation of events after the resurrection of Christ.

2. (Acts 1:3) How long did Christ remain on earth after His resurrection? _____
3. (Acts 1:4-5) What did He command the Apostles to do just before His ascension into heaven? _____

4. (Acts 1:6) What question did the Apostles ask of Christ? _____

The Old Testament prophets had predicted that the Messiah would come and restore the nation to greatness. During the time of Christ’s earthly walk, His followers were hopeful that this would occur. They were disappointed however, when He was rejected and crucified. Now with Christ’s resurrection there was new hope, and the disciples again anticipated the restoration of the nation.

5. (Acts 1:8) What promise did Christ make to these Jewish disciples? _____

6. (v. 9-11) These verses record Christ’s ascension into heaven. In your own words, describe what happened.

7. Please carefully read Acts 1:12-26. _____ (Check) Describe the activities of Christ’s followers after he ascended into heaven? (v. 12-14) What were they doing in those days? _____

8. (Acts 1:15-20) Judas Iscariot was the Apostle who had betrayed Christ. According to Peter's comments, what had happened to Judas? _____

9. (Acts 1:23-26) Describe what happened and name the man chosen to replace Judas. _____

The casting of lots was a recognized method for finding the Lord's will in the Old Testament. (See: Lev. 16:8; Josh. 14:2; 1 Sam. 14:41-42; Neh. 10:34, 11:1; Proverbs 16:33, 18:18.) The Apostles themselves had already received the Holy Spirit (John 20:22,23). They were at that time "with one mind, continually devoting themselves to prayer...." The decision was from the Lord and Matthias became the replacement for Judas, the 12th Apostle.

All that you read in this portion of Acts relates to the nation of Israel and the Messianic Kingdom which God had promised them. In Jeremiah 30:1-7 a promise was made of a restored nation to be ruled over by the Messiah. John the Baptist and then Christ preached, "The kingdom of heaven is at hand (Matt. 3:2, 4:17)." Peter and the Apostles were promised that in that Kingdom they will sit on 12 thrones judging the 12 tribes of Israel (Matt. 19:23; also Matt. 16:18,19, 18:18-20).

Just before he ascended into heaven, Jesus told His Apostles to wait in Jerusalem to receive from Him a special power through the Holy Spirit to carry out their task. On the day of Pentecost Christ baptized them with the Holy Spirit. Afterwards they possessed mighty and miraculous powers as they carried out their ministry to Israel.

In the Old Testament the prophet Joel had promised a great outpouring of the Holy Spirit at the time when the Lord would restore the nation of Israel.

10. (Joel 2:28-32) List several of the things which Joel predicted would take place. _____

11. (Joel 3:1) What would God be doing when these things happened? _____

12. John the Baptist makes a reference to Joel's prophecy. Refer to Matthew 3:11. John baptized with water. According to this verse, what two things would Christ baptize the Jews with?

1. _____ 2. _____

13. Refer again to Acts 1:4,5,8.

(v. 5) What did Christ say was about to happen? _____

(v. 8) What would the result of this action be? _____

The Old Testament prophets, John the Baptist and Jesus Christ all promised a great outpouring of the Holy Spirit as the restoration of Israel drew near. Beginning in Acts 2, we see this prophecy starting to be fulfilled.

14 Please read carefully Acts 2:1-13. _____ (Check)

15. The “they” of Acts 2:1 probably refers back to the 12 Apostles in the preceding verse 1:26. On the day of Pentecost they were all together in one place. Carefully consider verses. 2-4 and describe what happened.

The word in verse four translated “tongues” means, when used literally, the physical part of the body...the tongue. When used figuratively, as it is here, it means “language.”

16. Refer to verses. 5-11. Pentecost was one of the feast days when Jewish pilgrims from all over the world returned to Jerusalem. List some of the foreign lands from which the people had come who heard the disciples speak. _____

17. (vv. 6,8,11) What were the Apostles speaking? _____

This is the miracle of tongues. Men who had never studied these languages were supernaturally empowered to speak them as an authenticating sign to the Jews present that they were truly speaking from God.

18. Some said the Apostles were merely drunk (v. 13). Why, according to Peter, was this not possible (v. 15)?

19. (vv 16-17) According to Peter, what was taking place? _____

20. This miracle prepares the Jews for a message. Please read carefully Acts 2:22-36 _____ (Check)

21. (v. 22) To whom is Peter speaking in this section? _____

22. (v. 23) What had the “men of Israel” done? _____

23. (v. 33) What had Christ just done? _____

24. (vs. 37-38) Some of those Jews who heard Peter were convicted of their sin and asked, “What shall we do? What did Peter tell these Jews they must do? _____

The Messianic Kingdom was being offered to Israel. For it to actually come the Jews had to first repent of their sins and demonstrate that repentance by being baptized in water.

Peter's command to Israel was the same as that of John the Baptist, "repent and be baptized." The difference was that now the Messiah had been crucified, had been raised from the grave, and had ascended into heaven. With John the Kingdom was merely "at hand." Here it was actually being offered. If Israel had repented at this point in early Acts the seven year tribulation would have begun, after which Christ would have returned and established the Kingdom.

25. (v. 41) How many people responded to Peter's message that day? _____

26. (vv. 44,45) What did these believers do with their personal property? _____

A second miracle...A second message

27. Please read again (Acts 3:1-26). ____ (Check)

28. (Acts 3:1-10) Describe the miracle which took place. _____

29. (Acts 3:12) Peter now uses this occasion to preach another sermon. To whom is Peter speaking? _____

30. (3:14-15a) What had Israel done? _____

(v. 15b) What had God done? _____

31. (v. 16) By what power had the miracle which they had just seen been accomplished? _____

32. (Acts 3:19-21) What did Peter tell the Jews to do? _____

(v. 19-20) What three things would happen if Israel would repent? _____

33. (v. 21) What promised period would begin when Christ came back out of heaven? _____

The phrases "times of refreshing" and "period of restoration" refer to the Messianic Kingdom about which the prophets had spoken. This Kingdom was "at hand" during the time of Christ's earthly ministry. In early Acts, the Messianic Kingdom was offered to the nation of Israel if they would repent.

We refer again to J. Sidlow Baxter's comment as quoted earlier:

"The period covered by Acts, we repeat, was a suspense period. So long as the Kingdom was being offered to the nation the return of the Lord could have happened without delay upon the fulfillment

of the conditions...would Israel respond, repent, receive? That was the suspense point.”

As our study continues we see that many Israelites did repent but, as a whole, the nation rejected Christ a second time.

34. Please carefully read Acts 4:1-3. _____ (Check)

Who came along as the Apostles were speaking? _____

Why were these men disturbed? _____

What did they do to the Apostles? _____

35. Please carefully read Acts 4:8-12. _____ (Check)

To whom is Peter speaking? _____

What message did he proclaim to them? _____

36. (vs. 15-18) Did the Jewish leaders repent at Peter’s preaching? _____ (Yes) _____ (No)

What was their response? _____

What instructions did they give the Apostles before letting them go? _____

37. Read Acts 4:32-37. ____ (Check) Remember also Acts 2:43-45. Describe the lifestyle of these Jewish believers as they waited for Christ to return and restore Israel. _____

38. There is an important message for all in the events of Acts 5:1-11. Please read this story again. ____ (Check)

What do you think is one important application of this story? _____

39. (Acts 5:12-16) This section reminds us of our Lord’s earthly ministry in Israel. List two kinds of miracles which were taking place?

1.) _____ 2.) _____

40. According to verses. 17-18, what did the High Priest and his associates do and why? _____

An angel released Peter and the Apostles from jail. The next day they were brought back before the Jewish leaders.

41. (Acts 5:30-33) Peter again preached Christ to the Jewish leaders. What was their response this time? _____

Because of a problem among the believers a number of assistants to the Apostles were chosen.

42. Read Acts 6:1-6 for the account of this development. _____ (Check)

43. Read Acts 6:3,8-15. _____ (Check)

What kind of man was Stephen? _____

44. (vv. 9,10) As Stephen preached Christ some of the Jews tried to argue with him but could not prevail. What did they do when they could not answer his arguments (vv. 11-13)? _____

THE CRISIS POINT HAS BEEN REACHED!

Luke carefully recorded the events in this portion of the book of Acts in order to demonstrate Israel's second rejection of Christ. The leaders had already heard the message of Christ preached several times. As Stephen spoke they heard it again, but this time their rejection settled the matter.

45. Stephen's sermon to the Jewish leaders is recorded in Acts 7:1-60. Please read again. _____ (Check)

46. (Acts 7:51-53) In his message Stephen reviews the history of Israel to show that they have always rejected the messengers of God. What accusations does Stephen make against Israel? (Use your own words!)

47. (Acts 7:54-58) Describe the response of the Jewish leaders to Stephen's message. _____

48. (vs. 59,60) What two prayers did Stephen make as he died? _____

The murder of Stephen symbolized Israel's second rejection of Christ. With that rejection the dispensation of Law came to a close and the dispensation of the Messianic Kingdom was postponed.

In our next lesson we will see God raise up a new spokesman and begin a new dispensation. The Dispensation of the Grace of God under which we now live.

49. Please write out the memory verse for this lesson in the space below.

Use the space below to ask any questions or makes any comments about theses lessons you wish.

I would like to be contacted by a minister in my area that can help me better understand God's Word. If checked please include a telephone number _____

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