

**“Paul’s Second Letter to Timothy —
The Great Transition, The Glorious Sweep of God’s Abundant Grace — Part 5”**

Review:

To summarize how far we have come in considering the place of the Book of the Acts, we have seen over and over how in these early chapters God’s dealings are with his own called out nation Israel. And most importantly, the focus is on the resurrected Lord Jesus and what that God intends to be next in line for his chosen people, the Jews and his prophesied elect nation in preparation for his return and the establishing of the Kingdom on earth is clear. That will require an elect people fully submissive to the resurrected Lord of glory, Israel’s long awaited Messiah, and, the nation’s leaders as well, it should go without saying, must be converted, repenting of their sins.

It was fact also and should be remembered well as we read here in these chapters of how Christ’s proclamation of forgiveness of his enemies who in ignorance had turned him over to the Cross. That would abide and now, however, the time had come to right those wrongs. Mercy had been given but now those guilty parties would be held to account and a claim of ignorance would no longer stand. Preaching and signs and wonders have made these sinners accountable to God. Their repentance and faith was required therefore. So the course ahead was determined by the Lord.

- ***But rather than preaching the Risen Christ everywhere immediately as the commission had ordained, the risen Lord had asked his disciples to remain in Jerusalem and to await there the coming of the Spirit of God.***
- ***They obeyed doing just that. And on the day of the yearly Pentecost celebration the Holy Spirit was given with mighty Signs and Wonders. Peter preached boldly to those assembled that from all the known world, Jews from every land there on a great pilgrimage, from Joel’s prophecy. The nation and its leaders were now put on notice. Yes, mercy had been given but now they must repent or surely face their coming judgment.***
- ***Later, after much work by the Holy Spirit had occurred, Peter preached again after a man lame from birth was healed and he and many including this new disciple went into the Temple with many wondering how this man could have been so dramatically healed.***

Peter answers their questionings. But in his address he pointedly blames them and their rulers (3:17) for the Lord's death. Yes, they had done that despicable deed ignorantly. But now needed prophecies had been fulfilled and the Spirit with his dramatic and visible work had been given. There were now no longer any excuses.

Peter preached that what was required for this next phase of Israel's destiny to be fulfilled — now the time was ripe for the return of the Lord to bless his own and to judge those unbelieving, namely many of these hearing Peter's words that day. For the Lord God would have his way indeed as Moses had said and that judgment would come to those still not submitting to their risen Messiah and the glorious word of his resurrection. For indeed he who had now been clearly proven to be their Messiah and Redeemer would be their Judge. And his return in judgment was at hand!

- ***Chapter 4 then brings a remarkable interchange in the Temple with Israel's leaders. But though 5000 were just saved here, they nevertheless command the apostles to stop speaking in the name of Jesus.***
- ***Chapter 5 brings the narrative of Ananias and Sapphira, self acknowledged members of the faithful company selling property for the sake of the group. These though hypocritically only give a portion of the whole amount over to the apostles. And they are struck down dead shortly thereafter. It seems they were impostors, doesn't it, and the judgment foreshadowed Kingdom judgments as prophecy had detailed.***

This is where we were in our studies last time. Peter and the other apostles are imprisoned again after many more are healed but an angel releases them and again they are brought before the council and commanded to be silenced. But they do not obey man but the angel that had commanded them to be bold still. Then having been brought again before the council, Israel's rulers are exhorted by a man named Gamaliel to allow the apostles to continue their preaching lest perhaps God judge them all. They are released and continue preaching with many being saved. But they are still in a state of unbelief and continue unified in their intention to have the apostles killed nevertheless.

Today's Outline: The Kingdom Foreshadowed in Power But Nevertheless Rejected by Israel's Leaders:

- ***Signs and Wonders Given with the Sharing of Both Property and Hearts***
- ***A Rebellious Spirit Continues With Kingdom-Like Judgments Following***
- ***The Kingdom Foreshadowed in Power But Nevertheless Rejected***

I. Signs and Wonders Given with the Sharing of Both Property and Hearts:

- ***We find recorded in chapter 4 of the Acts truly awesome miracles and signs foreshadowing the coming of the Kingdom in power and glory. That wonderful work of God continues in the next two chapters as we have seen here recently. And along with that many repented of their sins of unbelief in offering up the Lord to the shame of Calvary's Cross. And the miracles were not limited to healings, speaking in unlearned languages or such like, but were also in the realm of the soul and spirit. In chapter 4 we read of that with these words:***

Acts 4:29-32

29 And now, Lord, behold their threatenings: and grant unto thy servants,
that with all boldness they may speak thy word,
30 By stretching forth thine hand to heal; and that signs and wonders
may be done by the name of thy holy child Jesus.

31 And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness.

32 And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul: neither said any of *them* that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common.

This Spirit imposed communal spirit lead in the following verses to the sharing of private property by all, another foreshadowing of the coming principles of life in the Millennial Kingdom:

Acts 4:34-35

34 Neither was there any among them that lacked: for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold,

35 And laid *them* down at the apostles' feet: and distribution was made unto every man according as he had need.

As we saw last time, this widespread change of heart through the Spirit's working in Kingdom power then led to something probably quite unexpected, in the Ananias and Sapphira incident we find recorded at the beginning of chapter 5. For there was a rebellious spirit developing within the assembly of believers and roots of bitterness such as this always have great consequence if not soon destroyed.

II. A Rebellious Spirit Continues With Kingdom-Like Judgments Following:

- ***You will recall from last time how a great work of the Spirit was occurring among the believers. As chapter 4 ended, "they all shared all ...". But there was a rebellion growing rapidly in their midst:***

Acts 5:1-5

***1 But a certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession,
2 And kept back part of the price, his wife also being privy to it, and brought a certain part, and laid it at the apostles' feet.
3 But Peter said, Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost, and to keep back part of the price of the land?
4 Whiles it remained, was it not thine own? and after it was sold, was it not in thine own power? why hast thou conceived this thing in thine heart? thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God.
5 And Ananias hearing these words fell down, and gave up the ghost: and great fear came on all them that heard these things.***

His wife Sapphira also falls under the same judgment as the next verses reveal. Is this also not a foreshadowing of the Judgments yet to come under Christ's rule "with a rod of iron" for those rebelling against his authority.

So by mighty Signs and Wonders was the word preached and the undeniable works of the Spirit of God in hearts and minds was evident as "they were all with one accord in Solomon's porch", verse 12, and many more were consequently coming to Kingdom faith in their Messiah according to verse 14.

But the response of Israel's religious leaders was just the opposite:

Acts 5:28 Saying, Did not we straitly command you that ye should not teach in this name? and, **behold, ye have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this man's blood upon us.**

- ***Well, the spirit of division and rebellion against the very Spirit of God continued and grew so that as chapter 6 opens, there are even divisions in the body of believers into factions and at the base of this was the free distribution of the “necessities of life” by the apostles to the group “according to their needs”.***

It seems that God had already begun to draw back his support according to the principles defining the Pentecostal Dispensation and the work of the Spirit in the hearts of many was on the wane. For many had needs that were not being met and the spirit of communion was also broken where it had previously been pervasive:

Acts 6:1 And in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied, there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministration.

III. The Kingdom Foreshadowed in Power But Nevertheless Rejected:

- ***Yes, miracles and signs of the physical kind continued in addition to the unity seen everywhere. Surely Israel was rising ... But their rulers had been plotting to kill the apostles and now they single out a new disciple from Cyprus named Stephen!***
- ***The Signs and Wonders indicated that the offer of the Kingdom to Israel was authentic as many were in fact brought to repentance and faith. But what about the Nation with its leaders? Were the Power and the Signs accompanying the preaching of the Kingdom enough to carry the day for the Lord of glory? We saw that they were not last time as we looked at the preaching of Peter to Israel's leaders in chapter 4 of the Acts.***

Now Stephen has been chosen to represent the Kingdom working of God before Israel's leaders who are on the path of destruction it seems as they reject the testimony of God again and again. Much mercy the Lord has shown so far. Would it continue?

[READ] Acts 6:7-8

7 And the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly; and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith.

8 And Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and miracles among the people.

- ***But the hearts of Israel's leaders were not softened but hardened even more fully as they observed these signs and wonders:***

[READ] Acts 6:13-15

13 And [they] set up false witnesses, which said, This man ceaseth not to speak blasphemous words against this holy place, and the law:

14 For we have heard him say, that this Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place, and shall change the customs which Moses delivered us.

15 And all that sat in the council, looking stedfastly on him, saw his face as it had been the face of an angel.

- ***Stephen is now empowered by God to boldly share his testimony and his preaching. But the die was cast. Though a great multitude, even of the priests had been converted, many Jewish leaders in Jerusalem still opposed the Messianic faith as Peter had preached it. The ruling council met to consider their claims against the apostles and though they could not effectively oppose them in argument, they nevertheless continued to oppose them in spirit and focused on matters of "customs" and issues of Mosaic law and its interpretation. False witnesses were compelled to testify also of blasphemous statements made by the apostles.***

Acts 7:1 "... Then said the high priest, Are these things so?"

What follows is one of the most astounding speeches in the Bible, for Stephen condemns his own nation for their rejection of the Messianic teaching and of Jesus, crucified at their own hand yet risen again and seated at God's right hand awaiting the time to return to this sin cursed earth. And his return in power and glory will bring terror against those who have perpetuated such sin bringing the judgment of Almighty God against his own beloved nation, Israel:

- ***This is a long speech indeed and so we will merely summarize it today.***

Verses 2-5: Abraham's calling is reviews for the people.

Verses 6-16 The events leading Joseph and then Jacob and his family to Egypt and then finally after the 400 years of bondage, to Moses and the exodus from Egypt

Verses 17-28. At age 40, Moses leaves Egypt for 40 years of exile in Midian

Verses 29-34: God appears to Moses in the burning bush and commissions him to deliver Israel out of bondage in Egypt

Verses 35-36: God delivers Israel under Moses leadership with great signs and miracles

Verses 37-44: The nation of Israel had a history of refusing the worship prescribed under the Law and worshipped idols often instead.

Verses 45-50: How God raised up David and his son Solomon as well to lead his people. But they fell again into idolatry for centuries instead of walking in righteousness in response to the promptings of God through the Mosaic Law. There were very few righteous kings during those next many centuries leading up to Christ's coming. And God did not even provide one prophet for 400 years until John came.

Verses 51-53: Stephen's closing words are powerful indeed as he concludes with this marvelous review of Israel's history finishing with words that cut to the heart many of those listening:

[READ] Acts 7:51-54

51 Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers [did], so [do] ye.

52 Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted? and they have slain them which shewed before of the coming of the Just One; of whom ye have been now the betrayers and murderers:

53 Who have received the law by the disposition of angels, and have not kept [it].

54 When they heard these things, they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed on him with [their] teeth.

[READ] Acts 7:55-60

55 But he, being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up stedfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God,

56 And said, Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God.

57 Then they cried out with a loud voice, and stopped their ears, and ran upon him with one accord,
 58 And cast [him] out of the city, and stoned [him]: and the witnesses laid down their clothes at a young man's feet, whose name was Saul.
 59 And they stoned Stephen, calling upon [God], and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.
 60 And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this, he fell asleep.

- *This reminds me so much of the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit we read of in Mark's gospel:*

Mark 3:28-29

**28 Verily I say unto you, All sins shall be forgiven unto the sons of men, and blasphemies wherewith soever they shall blaspheme:
 29 But he that shall blaspheme against the Holy Ghost hath never forgiveness, but is in danger of eternal damnation...**

- *So we have seen how in the Pentecostal period of early Acts, the Kingdom was ultimately rejected by Israel's leadership. Israel nationally "decreases" whereas it had been increasing nationally after Christ's Resurrection and the giving forth of the Spirit 50 days later on Pentecost. With Stephen's great speech again offering the kingdom to a rebellious nation indeed, the nation rejects that offer given through the Lord's representative. Stephen's martyrdom is the fateful consequence of their rejection.*
- *And Saul, a leader of the Pharisees is the one bringing the formal condemnation. Now everything is in its place for the next phase in "the glorious sweep of God's abundance grace", as God now begins to formally set aside Israel and to turn to the Gentiles. The great Transition is now underway, from the Nation of Israel to the Church which is his Body. Amen!*

God was merciful indeed with second chances multiplied due to their acting in ignorance and due to Christ's own forgiveness. 2 Cor. 5 also mentions their ignorance. So there were steps in history that were under the direct planning of God himself and scripture notes what some of them were. But no doubt there are many more"steps planned by the Lord".

But the nation and its leaders were no longer “ignorant” after Peter and then Stephen had preached. They were now guilty of rebellion against the Holy Spirit and against the Lord himself. And time had run out indeed.

Stephen has now been martyred and the one who held the token of his condemnation, Saul, now under the control of the mighty power of God, takes center stage in a remarkable way. He will remain in the center spotlight of the rest of the record given here in the Acts except for some few circumstances when Peter and the others will appear. We will continue here next time Lord willing.

Overview and Conclusions:

- ***In the early Acts period in Jerusalem, the Kingdom was finally rejected as we read in Acts 7. Israel now decreases whereas it had been increasing nationally as the Spirit was given 50 days after Christ’s Resurrection on the Day of Pentecost. Now, though Stephen’s great speech again stating the opportunity and the consequence of rejecting the Lord’s mercies was powerfully delivered, the nation rejected his inspired pleadings. His martyrdom was the result of that rejection.***

But God’s marvelous plan of Grace was still to be accomplished and Saul, a leader of the Pharisees, the one bringing Stephen’s formal condemnation, would be the instrument of choice for the Lord God in bringing many sinners to salvation through his offered abundant grace.

- ***We have seen that Israel as recorded in the early chapters of Acts was “rising” even in the face of much opposition. There was an Elect being saved indeed, but would this continue? As we have seen today, it did not. Though many were saved as the Gospel of the Kingdom with accompanying Signs and Wonders was preached, the Nation Itself was not established as God’s Elect Nation and as a People for His Name since its leaders had still not received the Risen Lord as their Messiah and Redeemer.***
- ***Stephen’s Martyrdom signaled the beginning of the end of this phase of God’s working and constituted the beginning of another great work of the Lord,***
- ***There will yet however be an Elect Nation from God’s point of view? established and Christ’s return to this earth to establish his earthly Kingdom will occur. For Israel, though, as prophesied, the Great***

***Tribulation period will be the occasion of that great work of the Lord.
Amen.***

***But for us living today under unlimited grace thorough our Risen
Lord Jesus Christ, grace and peace though faith in him. Praise God
for his unspeakable gift!***

Next stop — heaven's glory!