

The Basics of Mid-Acts Dispensationalism

By Ben Webb

Chapter 1: Dispensational Theology Distinguishes Between Israel and the Church

The scriptures repeatedly refer to the apostle Paul as "the apostle of the Gentiles" (Ro.11:13), "the minister of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles" (Ro.15:16), "the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles" (Eph. 3:1), etc. And Paul alone refers to this present time period in which we live as the dispensation of the grace of God (Eph.3:2).

In addition, Paul also states that a dispensation of the gospel was committed unto him, in 1Cor.9:17-18 -

"For if I do this thing willingly, I have a reward: but if against my will, a dispensation of the gospel is committed unto me. What is my reward then? Verily that, when I preach the gospel, I may make the gospel of Christ without charge, that I abuse not my power in the gospel."

And indeed, a dispensation is basically the same thing as an administration. For example, a Presidential administration might also be thought of as being a Presidential dispensation. So, in this present dispensation of grace, salvation is now being dispensed (or administered) to Uncircumcised Gentiles by grace through faith alone (see Eph. 2:8-9).

But until God revealed this mystery to Paul, this dispensation of grace in which we live had never been the subject of prophecy. Instead, Paul states that this present dispensation was not previously "made known" (revealed) unto the sons of men, in Eph. 3:1-6 -

"For this cause I Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles, If ye have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which is given me to you-ward: How that by revelation he made known unto me the mystery; (as I wrote afore in few words, Whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ) Which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit; That the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel:"

This fact cannot be emphasized enough. It is important to understand that because Uncircumcised Gentiles can now be saved, the dispensation of grace in which we now live could never have been the subject of prophecy, because the uncircumcised had no hope in the

previous dispensations (see Gen. 17:14; Ex. 12:48; Ezek. 44:7-9). That is why verse 3 above states that that this dispensation was previously a "mystery".

Paul again states that the dispensation of God which was given to him had been a mystery hidden from ages and from generations, in Col. 1:25-27 -

"Whereof I am made a minister, according to the dispensation of God which is given to me for you, to fulfil the word of God; Even the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to his saints: To whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory:"

So, Col. 1:25-27 and Eph. 3:2 both prove that this present dispensation was given to Paul, after having previously been a hidden mystery (again, it was never foretold in prophecy). And as we shall see, numerous other passages also show that Paul alone had a unique ministry as the apostle of the Gentiles.

But during the Four Gospels, the Lord Jesus Christ and His 12 apostles preached the "gospel of the kingdom" (Mt.4:23; Mt.9:35; Mt.24:14; Mk.1:14), which actually had been the subject of prophecy. In contrast to this present dispensation of grace, the gospel of the kingdom was not a mystery at all, because prophecy clearly states that God's kingdom is to be literally established at some future point, with Jerusalem at its center (Is.2:1-4; Micah 4:1-3; Zech.8:20-23). This was the prophesied kingdom that Jesus and His apostles proclaimed as being "at hand" (see Mt. 3:2; Mt. 4:17; Mt. 10:7; etc.). But this kingdom, which is to be centered in Jerusalem, cannot exist without Jesus as its King. And because the nation of Israel still rejects the Lord Jesus Christ, we know that Israel's prophesied kingdom has not yet been established. Nor can it even be "at hand", until Israel as a nation is ready to accept the Lord Jesus Christ.

So, because the present salvation of Uncircumcised Gentiles was never foretold by any Old Testament prophet, or even by the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, this present "dispensation of grace" covers an UNPROPHESIED time period which the apostle Paul refers to as "the mystery".

Dispensationalism, then, recognizes the distinction between Israel and the church, as we see when we apply a literal interpretation of scripture. Consequently, Dispensationalism is rooted in the belief that scriptures which apply to Israel do not apply to the present church. Likewise, Mid-Acts Dispensationalism is based upon the teaching that the present body of Christ began with the apostle Paul, when he was saved during the mid-Acts period.

In addition, mid-Acts Dispensationalists also believe that since neither the Old Testament or the Four Gospels ever mention the possibility that Uncircumcised Gentiles could be saved through Israel's fall, those scriptures could not be written directly to the church today. Even

though the Old Testament scriptures and the Four Gospels were written "for" our learning and admonition, they were not written directly "to" us today, as Paul also states in Ro. 15:4 -

For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope.

So, all prophecies concerning Gentile salvation through the glorification of Israel have yet to be fulfilled, because Israel is currently in a fallen state due to her unbelief (Ro. 11:11-13). Since the prophecies that pertain to Gentile salvation all center around a future time in which the Gentiles will seek the Lord in Jerusalem (see Is.2:1-4; Micah 4:1-3; Zech.8:20-23), those Gentiles will again be blessed through the exaltation of Israel, rather than through her "fall". For this reason, our salvation today can not be based upon Old Testament prophecy.

Chapter 2: The 12 Preach the Gospel of the Kingdom

While the word "gospel" means "good news", there are different types of good news (gospels) in the Bible. For example, as we saw earlier, 1 Cor.15:1-4 states that the gospel by which we are saved is that Christ died for our sins. Yet prior to the Lord's crucifixion, the 12 apostles never realized Jesus had to die at all; much less that He would die for the sins of Uncircumcised Gentiles. Nevertheless, these apostles still preached "the gospel of the kingdom" to Israel, literally proclaiming the kingdom to be "at hand" (Mt. 4:23; Mt. 9:35; Mt. 10:7).

It is a fact that when Jesus and His 12 apostles preached the "gospel of the kingdom", they literally meant for Israel to "repent, for the kingdom is at hand". The appointed time had finally arrived for God to establish His prophesied kingdom, if the nation of Israel would only repent and believe the gospel. John the Baptist first began preaching that the kingdom of heaven was "at hand" in Matt. 3:1-2 -

"In those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judaea, And saying, Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

Jesus Himself also preached, "Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand", in Matt. 4:17 -

"From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

Six verses later, this message that Jesus preached is called "the gospel of the kingdom", in Mt. 4:23 -

And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all manner of sickness and all manner of disease among the people.

So, by preaching "the kingdom of heaven is at hand", we see that Jesus preached the gospel of the kingdom, according to Mt.4:17-23 above. Likewise, Jesus also sent His 12 apostles out to preach the gospel of the kingdom ("the kingdom of heaven is at hand") to the house of Israel (and not to the Gentiles), in Mt. 10:5-7 -

"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. And as ye go, preach, saying, The kingdom of heaven is at hand."

However, at the time the 12 apostles were preaching this "gospel of the kingdom", they never realized Jesus would ever die at all. Although Jesus prophesied of His death several times, none of the apostles understood its necessity, until after His resurrection. During the time they were preaching the gospel of the kingdom, it was absolutely essential for the Lord's future crucifixion to remain hidden; because Paul states that if the princes of this world had known about it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory, in 1 Cor. 2:7-8 -

"But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world unto our glory: Which none of the princes of this world knew: for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory."

So, it is clear as we read through the Four Gospels that because the 12 apostles did not know that Christ would die and be resurrected, they could not have been preaching the gospel by which we are saved, which is the fact that "Christ died for our sins..." (1 Cor. 15:1-4).

Here are a few examples: To begin with, just prior to the Lord's crucifixion on the cross, the 12 apostles still did not understand that the Son of man had to die, according to Luke 18:31-34 -

"Then he took unto him the twelve, and said unto them, Behold, we go up to Jerusalem, and all things that are written by the prophets concerning the Son of man shall be accomplished. For he shall be delivered unto the Gentiles, and shall be mocked, and spitefully entreated, and spitted on: And they shall scourge him, and put him to death: and the third day he shall rise again. And they understood none of these things: and this saying was hid from them, neither knew they the things which were spoken."

Yet the 12 had been preaching the gospel of the kingdom for 3 years by this time, without ever realizing that Jesus would die; much less that He would be raised for our justification, as Paul states in Ro. 4:25 -

Who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification.

There are many other passages documenting the fact that the 12 never realized Jesus had to die, as they went forth preaching the gospel of the kingdom. Six days before being transfigured on the mountain (Mt.17:1-8), Jesus plainly told His disciples that He would be killed and raised again the third day. But instead of rejoicing, Peter rebuked Jesus, in Mt. 16:21-23 -

"From that time forth began Jesus to shew unto his disciples, how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day. Then Peter took him, and began to rebuke him, saying, Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall not be unto thee. But he turned, and said unto Peter, Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art an offence unto me: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men."

Mark also relates the event in which the disciples - during the time that they were preaching "the gospel of the kingdom" - failed to understand that Jesus had to die, in Mk.9:30-32 -

"And they departed thence, and passed through Galilee; and he would not that any man should know it. For he taught his disciples, and said unto them, The Son of man is delivered into the hands of men, and they shall kill him; and after that he is killed, he shall rise the third day. But they understood not that saying, and were afraid to ask him."

In addition, Luke also shows the disciples' total lack of understanding the following day, in Luke 9:44-45 -

"Let these sayings sink down into your ears: for the Son of man shall be delivered into the hands of men. But they understood not this saying, and it was hid from them, that they perceived it not: and they feared to ask him of that saying."

Even when the Lord was taken to be crucified, Peter still did not realize that Christ would die and be resurrected. Otherwise, he would not have cut off the ear of the high priest's servant, in John 18:10-11 -

"Then Simon Peter having a sword drew it, and smote the high priest's servant, and cut off his right ear. The servant's name was Malchus. Then said Jesus unto Peter, Put up thy sword into the sheath: the cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?"

Likewise, on the very day of Jesus' resurrection, neither Peter nor John knew that Jesus was to rise from the dead, according to John 20:1-10 -

"The first day of the week cometh Mary Magdalene early, when it was yet dark, unto the sepulchre, and seeth the stone taken away from the sepulchre. Then she runneth, and cometh

to Simon Peter, and to the other disciple, whom Jesus loved, and saith unto them, They have taken away the Lord out of the sepulchre, and we know not where they have laid him. Peter therefore went forth, and that other disciple, and came to the sepulchre. So they ran both together: and the other disciple did outrun Peter, and came first to the sepulchre. And he stooping down, and looking in, saw the linen clothes lying; yet went he not in. Then cometh Simon Peter following him, and went into the sepulchre, and seeth the linen clothes lie, And the napkin, that was about his head, not lying with the linen clothes, but wrapped together in a place by itself. Then went in also that other disciple, which came first to the sepulchre, and he saw, and believed. For as yet they knew not the scripture, that he must rise again from the dead. Then the disciples went away again unto their own home."

Verse 9 plainly shows that even here, Peter and John still did not know that Jesus would rise from the dead. Yet they had been preaching "the gospel of the kingdom" for over three years. Consequently, their proclamation of the "gospel of the kingdom" was not based upon the fact that Jesus would die for anyone's sins, or that He would be resurrected for anyone's justification (again, compare Ro.4:25 and 1 Cor. 15:1-4).

And the scriptures do teach that God's prophesied kingdom is to be established literally at some point in the future, just as the apostles proclaimed when they preached the "gospel of the kingdom". When His kingdom is finally established, prophecy states that God will reign over the earth from Jerusalem, and all nations shall flow unto it (see Isaiah 2:1-4; Micah 4:1-4; and Zech. 8:20-23). And the scripture cannot be broken (John 10:35); so God will indeed establish His kingdom on earth one day, just as He promised.

Today, though, in this present dispensation of grace, the kingdom is no longer being offered to Israel, since they reject their own King. God's prophesied kingdom has been temporarily delayed, and is no longer "at hand" (Mt. 3:2, Mt. 4:17; Mt. 10:7; Mk. 1:15; compare Luke 21:31). The gospel of the kingdom that the apostles were preaching does not apply to this present dispensation, because there is no salvation today apart from the Blood of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Chapter 3: Isaiah 53

Although Isaiah chapter 53 is a prophecy that Christ was to be "wounded" for transgressions, and that He would be "bruised" for iniquities, our present understanding of this prophecy is based upon LATER explanations revealed in the scriptures, because the passage in Isaiah is not very specific. While the apostles were probably familiar with this Old Testament passage, its application was hidden from them as they went forth preaching the gospel of the kingdom. Even though we now know that Isaiah 53 is a prophecy of the crucifixion of Jesus (which Philip

explained to the Ethiopian Eunuch in Acts chapter 8), we have the advantage of the New Testament scriptures to explain this. The apostles, though, did not yet possess this understanding prior to the Lord's resurrection. As explained earlier, it was essential for the Lord's then-future crucifixion to remain hidden during the time that the gospel of the kingdom was being preached; because Paul states in 1 Cor. 2:7-8 that that if the princes of this world had known about it, they would not have crucified the Lord, and this present dispensation would have never come to pass. Therefore, when it is read with the limited understanding which the apostles had at that time, Isaiah 53 is indeed a cryptic passage -

"Who hath believed our report? and to whom is the arm of the LORD revealed? For he shall grow up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground: he hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him. He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth. He was taken from prison and from judgment: and who shall declare his generation? for he was cut off out of the land of the living: for the transgression of my people was he stricken. And he made his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death; because he had done no violence, neither was any deceit in his mouth. Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise him; he hath put him to grief: when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in his hand. He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied: by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities. Therefore will I divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong; because he hath poured out his soul unto death: and he was numbered with the transgressors; and he bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors."

We must remember the imperfect understanding the apostles had at the time concerning prophecies such as Isaiah 53, and be careful not to read our own understanding into their actions. Although we now have a better understanding of these Old Testament prophecies (based upon the New Testament Scriptures), this does not mean the 12 apostles also understood these prophecies before they were fulfilled. Instead, since they never realized that Jesus had to die, they had no idea at the time that Isaiah chapter 53 was a prophecy concerning the Lord's then-future crucifixion.

Chapter 4: Rightly Dividing the Word: A Scriptural Necessity

The above passages illustrate the importance of distinguishing between the different gospels that were preached in the Bible. Many Christians, though, fail to distinguish between these gospels. Because of this, they may erroneously claim certain promises and doctrines which, although scripturally accurate, are not meant to be claimed today in the dispensation of grace. Even some scriptural doctrines, such as the observance of the Jewish dietary law, are not mandatory in the Christian faith today (contrary to what some legalistic brethren would have us believe). The reason such confusion reigns today is largely because many Christians fail to heed the apostle Paul's instructions to "rightly divide the word" in 2 Timothy 2:15 -

"Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth."

In order to rightly divide "the word of truth" (the Bible), notice that we must first study the word. And all Christians do indeed make divisions in the Word of God. For instance, most Christians make a division between the Old and New Testaments, based on tradition. But in order to be a "workman that needeth not to be ashamed", we should adhere only to the divisions the Lord has made, and adopt the same attitude taken by the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, as well as all other men of God in the Bible: The scriptures alone are to be our final authority, and we should recognize them as being the inspired and inerrant word of God.

Chapter 5: The New Covenant did NOT Begin with the Birth of Christ

A number of Christians today believe the New Testament (or the New Covenant) began with the birth of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Old Testament, then, is thought to end immediately after the book of Malachi, with the birth of Jesus in Matthew beginning the New Testament. The Lord, though, inspired the author of the book of Hebrews to draw the line at the death of Jesus, and not at His birth. The author of Hebrews states that a testament requires the death of the testator, and is only in force after death. Therefore, the actual New Testament could not have begun with the birth of Jesus, according to Hebrews 9:15-18 -

"And for this cause he is the mediator of the new testament, that by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first testament, they which are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance. For where a testament is, there must also of necessity be the death of the testator. For a testament is of force after men are dead:

otherwise it is of no strength at all while the testator liveth. Whereupon neither the first testament was dedicated without blood."

While this may surprise many who do not take a Dispensational approach to the Bible, the above passage clearly proves that the New Testament could not have begun with the birth of Christ. As a matter of fact, Jesus Himself even stated that the New Testament was to be implemented through His blood, in Mark 14:23-24 -

"And he took the cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them: and they all drank of it. And he said unto them, This is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many."

The New Testament, then, could not have begun with the birth of the Christ Child in the manger, as many Christians are led to believe. Instead, it is only for convenience that the Hebrew Scriptures (the "Old Testament") have been separated from the Greek Scriptures that were written after the birth of Jesus (the "New Testament"). Yet this convenience has actually become a tradition down through the years. Thus, in order to rightly divide the word of truth (2 Tim. 2:15), we must be careful to allow the inspired scriptures themselves to be our final authority. Because the New Testament did not begin with the birth of Jesus, this example serves to illustrate the fact that man's traditions, no matter how sincere they may be, can actually lead us astray.

Chapter 6: Circumcision: The TOKEN of the Abrahamic Covenant

One basic characteristic of the Jews' religion was the fact that the Lord separated them from the Gentiles, by requiring every male in Israel to be circumcised. The Lord then made certain conditional promises to the nation of Israel, based upon this covenant of circumcision. By contrast, though, there is now no difference in Christ between Jew or Gentile (Ro.10:12; Ro.3:22), and physical circumcision is not required in this dispensation of grace (Gal.5:1-6).

There is, however, a tendency today for some believers to claim certain promises that the Lord had made only to Israel, and which are not ours to claim. We should therefore remember that at the time the Lord made these conditional promises to Israel, He also made a distinction between Israel and the Gentiles, based upon the fact that every Jewish male was required to be circumcised.

Circumcision actually originated as a token of the covenant the Lord made with Abraham (see Gen.17:11). In this covenant, the Lord first required Abraham to be circumcised, along with all males in his household. Circumcision was not merely an option, either; it was a requirement. The uncircumcised man was to be cut off from his people, according to Genesis 17:13-14 -

He that is born in thy house, and he that is bought with thy money, must needs be circumcised: and my covenant shall be in your flesh for an everlasting covenant. And the uncircumcised man child whose flesh of his foreskin is not circumcised, that soul shall be cut off from his people; he hath broken my covenant."

Uncircumcised Gentiles, then, were never allowed to be partakers of the Lord's covenants with Israel. Instead, each "stranger" (Gentile) who allied himself with Israel, and who wished to eat the passover, was required to first be circumcised, according to Ex.12:48-49 -

"And when a stranger shall sojourn with thee, and will keep the passover to the LORD, let all his males be circumcised, and then let him come near and keep it; and he shall be as one that is born in the land: for no uncircumcised person shall eat thereof. One law shall be to him that is homeborn, and unto the stranger that sojourneth among you."

Prophecy, too, forbids Uncircumcised Gentiles from ever becoming partakers of Israel's future inheritance. For example, when Isaiah prophesied concerning the holy city of Jerusalem, he plainly stated that the uncircumcised and the unclean shall "no more come into" Zion, in Is.52:1

"Awake, awake; put on thy strength, O Zion; put on thy beautiful garments, O Jerusalem, the holy city: for henceforth there shall no more come into thee the uncircumcised and the unclean."

Ezekiel also states that no uncircumcised stranger shall enter the Lord's sanctuary, in Ezek.44:9

"Thus saith the Lord GOD; No stranger, uncircumcised in heart, nor uncircumcised in flesh, shall enter into my sanctuary, of any stranger that is among the children of Israel."

Since Ezek. 44:9 above states that the uncircumcised "in flesh" shall not enter the Lord's sanctuary, this proves that the passage should not be "spiritualized" by those who would try to make it refer to the "spiritual New Testament circumcision" of Ro.2:28-29 and Phil.3:3. In turn, this also prevents the "spiritualization" of the previous passage (Is. 52:1), which states that the uncircumcised shall "no more" come into Zion.

Circumcision, then, as the token of the Abrahamic covenant (Gen.17:11), was to be strictly observed by Gentiles who were allied with Israel. The uncircumcised were never allowed to partake of the Passover; and Is.52:1 and Ezek.44:9 prove that Uncircumcised Gentiles have no inheritance in the holy city of Jerusalem.

Chapter 7: The Children of Israel were to be SEPARATE from the Gentiles

In addition, the Lord had called Israel to be His chosen people from the start, and severed them from other people (the Gentiles), as He states in Lev.20:25-26 -

"Ye shall therefore put difference between clean beasts and unclean, and between unclean fowls and clean: and ye shall not make your souls abominable by beast, or by fowl, or by any manner of living thing that creepeth on the ground, which I have separated from you as unclean. And ye shall be holy unto me: for I the LORD am holy, and have severed you from other people, that ye should be mine."

Nor was Israel's separation voluntary. Instead, because of her separation from "all the people that are upon the face of the earth", Israel found grace in the Lord's sight, as Moses states in Ex.33:16 -

"For wherein shall it be known here that I and thy people have found grace in thy sight? is it not in that thou goest with us? so shall we be separated, I and thy people, from all the people that are upon the face of the earth."

In fact, after the hireling prophet Balaam had been unsuccessfully hired by Balak to curse the nation of Israel, the Lord even inspired Balaam to prophesy that the people of Israel were to dwell alone. Balaam also prophesied that "the people" (Israel) would not be reckoned among the nations, in Num.23:9 -

"For from the top of the rocks I see him, and from the hills I behold him: lo, the people shall dwell alone, and shall not be reckoned among the nations."

Chapter 8: God's Promised Blessing to Abraham: The Nation of Israel

Long before commanding Israel to separate herself from the Gentiles, God had promised to bless "all families of the earth" through Abram (whose name was changed to Abraham), in Gen.12:3 -

"And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed."

The above blessing was to initially occur through Abraham's descendants, or his plural "seed". We know that "all families of the earth" were to be blessed through Abraham's descendants, because the Lord later stated that Abraham's "seed" would be numbered "as the dust of the earth" in Gen. 13:14-16 -

"And the LORD said unto Abram, after that Lot was separated from him, Lift up now thine eyes, and look from the place where thou art northward, and southward, and eastward, and

westward: For all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed for ever. And I will make thy seed as the dust of the earth: so that if a man can number the dust of the earth, then shall thy seed also be numbered."

The Lord, then, first promised to bless those who blessed Abraham (Gen.12:3); and then stated in the above passage that Abraham's "seed" would be his descendants, who would be as numerous as the dust of the earth. Later, the Lord extended His promise to bless the nations of the earth through this "seed" to Abraham's son Isaac, in Gen.26:4 -

"And I will make thy seed to multiply as the stars of heaven, and will give unto thy seed all these countries; and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed;"

In the above passage, then, the "seed" through whom "all the nations of the earth" will be blessed are plural, rather than singular. Since the Lord had already promised to "multiply" Isaac's "seed" in Gen.13:14-16, He was therefore referring to the (then-future) nation of Israel as the "seed" through whom all nations of the earth would be blessed.

Later, the Lord extended this promise to Isaac's son Jacob, as well. Once again, the Lord promised that He would also bless "all the families of the earth" through Jacob's numerous "seed", in Gen. 28:14 -

"And thy seed shall be as the dust of the earth, and thou shalt spread abroad to the west, and to the east, and to the north, and to the south: and in thee and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed."

Again, Jacob's "seed" in the above passage is plural, since they are to become "as the dust of the earth". This "seed", then, through whom "all the families of the earth" would be blessed, were to become the nation of Israel (since the Lord would later change Jacob's name to Israel). Although we now know (from Paul's epistles) that the promised Seed (singular) would actually be Christ Himself (see Gal.3:16), this fact remained unknown throughout the Old Testament. Until Christ's ministry, the "seed" in the above passages, through whom all the families of the earth would be blessed, were the children of Israel.

So, when God promised to bless those who blessed Abraham's seed, this promise originally concerned those who blessed the nation of Israel. Throughout the Old Testament (and even in part of the New Testament), those Gentiles who blessed Israel received the Lord's blessing, since Israel was His chosen nation. The Lord's commitment to bless those who blessed the "seed" of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Gen.26:4; Gen.28:14) was thereby transferred to the entire nation of Israel, provided that the nation remained obedient to His commandments (see Deut.28:1-69). For example, after the hiring prophet Balaam had prophesied that the people

of Israel would dwell alone (Num.23:9), he also prophesied that the Lord would bless those who blessed Israel, in Numbers 24:9 -

"He couched, he lay down as a lion, and as a great lion: who shall stir him up? Blessed is he that blesseth thee, and cursed is he that curseth thee."

It was in this manner, then, that the Lord separated the nation of Israel, and gave her the preeminence (favor) above all the other nations. By hearkening unto the Lord's commandments, Israel was destined in prophecy to become "the head, and not the tail", according to Deut.28:13 -

"And the LORD shall make thee the head, and not the tail; and thou shalt be above only, and thou shalt not be beneath; if that thou hearken unto the commandments of the LORD thy God, which I command thee this day, to observe and to do them:"

At that time, then, Gentiles who worshipped the Lord were first required to circumcise their males, according to passages such as Ex.12:48-49. By doing so, these Gentiles were thereby blessing the nation of Israel (the physical seed of Abraham), and acknowledging their own inferiority as Gentiles.

In addition, contrary to another common belief, the Lord has never made any covenants (testaments) with the Gentiles. Such a teaching is totally unscriptural. Neither the Old Covenant (Exodus chapter 19), nor the New Covenant (Jeremiah chapter 31; Hebrews chapter 8) were made with Gentiles. Instead, the Old Covenant was made with "the children of Israel" (Ex. 19:3); and the New Covenant was made with "the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah" (Jer. 31:31; compare Heb. 8:8). Since the Lord had expressly forbidden the nation of Israel from making covenants with the Gentiles (see, for example, Ex.23:32; Deut.7:2), it is also important to note that He could never ignore His own instructions to Israel, and practice that which He had forbidden them from doing. Therefore, since the nation of Israel was already forbidden from making covenants with the Gentiles, neither would the Lord extend any of His covenants to include Uncircumcised Gentiles.

However, when the Lord first brought the nation of Israel out of the land of Egypt, He immediately promised to make His covenant with them, in Exodus 19:3-6 -

"And Moses went up unto God, and the LORD called unto him out of the mountain, saying, Thus shalt thou say to the house of Jacob, and tell the children of Israel; Ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians, and how I bare you on eagles' wings, and brought you unto myself. Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine: And ye shall be unto me a kingdom

of priests, and an holy nation. These are the words which thou shalt speak unto the children of Israel."

Today, though, since Israel rejects Jesus as her Messiah, Christians gain no advantage in the Lord's eyes by blessing that nation, because salvation is through the fall of Israel (again, see Ro.11:11). The Lord Jesus Christ, then, is the ONLY Seed of Abraham we are to bless today, because no man comes to the Father, except by Him (John 14:6). But we have seen that during Old Testament times, Israel was the "seed" through whom the nations were blessed. And in the future, there will come a time when Gentiles who seek after the Lord will again be required to bless the nation of Israel (Zech.8:20-23). Yet this will take place only when Israel as a nation recognizes the Lord Jesus Christ as her promised Messiah (Zech.12:10), and the kingdom is again restored to Israel (Acts 1:6; compare Is.2:1-4).

Chapter 9: Gentiles were Excluded from Christ's Earthly Ministry

Israel's separation from the Gentiles continued through the entire time period of the Four Gospels, and extended into the first chapters of the book of Acts. As a result, the Lord's ministry on earth was also confined to the nation of Israel, as Ezekiel had prophesied in Ezekiel 3:4-6 -

"And he said unto me, Son of man, go, get thee unto the house of Israel, and speak with my words unto them. For thou art not sent to a people of a strange speech and of an hard language, but to the house of Israel; Not to many people of a strange speech and of an hard language, whose words thou canst not understand. Surely, had I sent thee to them, they would have hearkened unto thee."

Jesus also commanded His apostles not to preach to the Gentiles, in Mt.10:5-6 -

"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."

Paul also says the Lord's ministry was confined to "the circumcision" (Israel) in Ro.15:8 -

"Now I say that Jesus Christ was a minister of the circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises made unto the fathers:"

Matthew, in fact, relates the account of a Canaanite woman (a Gentile) who asked Christ to heal her daughter, who was "grievously vexed with a devil". Yet the Lord initially refused to honor her request. Only after the Gentile woman acknowledged her own inferior position as a

Gentile, thus effectively blessing the nation of Israel (the seed of Abraham), did He agree to heal her daughter, according to Mt.15:22-28 -

"And, behold, a woman of Canaan came out of the same coasts, and cried unto him, saying, Have mercy on me, O Lord, thou Son of David; my daughter is grievously vexed with a devil. But he answered her not a word. And his disciples came and besought him, saying, Send her away; for she crieth after us. But he answered and said, I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel. Then came she and worshipped him, saying, Lord, help me. But he answered and said, It is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it to dogs. And she said, Truth, Lord: yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters' table. Then Jesus answered and said unto her, O woman, great is thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt. And her daughter was made whole from that very hour."

According to verse 23, the Lord would not even answer this Gentile woman at first. Even though she worshipped Him (verse 25), it is important to note that the Lord still compared the Gentiles to dogs (which were unclean animals). From His own words, then, we can see that even the Lord Himself considered Gentiles to be inferior to Israel at that time, since He plainly stated that He was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel (verse 24). Only after she acknowledged her own inferior position in verse 27, thereby blessing the nation of Israel (the seed of Abraham), did the Lord honor her request.

The above incident, then, was not simply a matter of the Lord blessing a Gentile woman because the "New Testament" had already begun. As we have seen, based on Heb.9:15-18, the New Testament could not have begun before the Lord's crucifixion (see Chapter 5).

Another example of the Gentiles' exclusion from the Lord's earthly ministry, in which a Gentile was only "worthy" of the Lord's consideration because he blessed the nation of Israel, is found in Luke chapter 7. There, a Roman Centurion (a Gentile) sent the Jewish elders to Jesus, asking Him to come and heal a servant who was near death. The only reason this Gentile was even considered worthy was due to the fact that he had blessed the nation of Israel by building them a synagogue, according to Luke7:2-5 -

"And a certain centurion's servant, who was dear unto him, was sick, and ready to die. And when he heard of Jesus, he sent unto him the elders of the Jews, beseeching him that he would come and heal his servant. And when they came to Jesus, they besought him instantly, saying, That he was worthy for whom he should do this: For he loveth our nation, and he hath built us a synagogue."

Since this Gentile had built a synagogue for the Jews, thereby blessing the nation of Israel, the Lord honored the Centurion's request. Before He arrived, though, the Gentile decided that he was not worthy to meet the Lord after all, and sent others asking Him to only speak a word

from a distance to heal his servant. The Lord then "marvelled" at the Centurion (Luke7:9), because He had not found such faith in all of Israel. Unlike this Gentile, the Lord's Own nation refused to believe in Him!

Again, the above passage is not an example of the Lord blessing Gentiles because the New Testament had begun. Heb.9:15-18 proves such an assumption to be impossible, since the Lord had not yet been crucified. Instead, this Gentile Centurion was only worthy of the Lord's consideration because he had blessed the nation of Israel (Abraham's "seed"), by building them a synagogue. This Gentile, then, was not a picture of Gentile salvation today, because we are saved through the fall of Israel (again, see Ro.11:11-13).

Nor did the separation between Jew and Gentile immediately cease with the resurrection of the Lord. Instead, this distinction continued for some time afterwards, as the Lord continued to give Israel every opportunity to repent and believe. In fact, there were not even any Gentiles present on the day of Pentecost in Acts chapter 2, when the apostles spoke in tongues. Instead, these were all Jews, and not Gentiles, according to Acts2:5-8 -

"And there were dwelling at Jerusalem Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven. Now when this was noised abroad, the multitude came together, and were confounded, because that every man heard them speak in his own language. And they were all amazed and marvelled, saying one to another, Behold, are not all these which speak Galilaeans? And how hear we every man in our own tongue, wherein we were born?"

According to verse 5, these men were not Gentiles, as some Christians mistakenly assume. Instead, these men were all devout Jews, who had returned to Jerusalem from the other nations in which they had been born. Many years earlier, the Lord had scattered the children of Israel among the nations, due to their rebellion and unbelief (see Deut.28:15-68). Yet according to Deut.16:16, every Jewish male who desired to worship the Lord was required to return to Jerusalem three times a year in order to do so: at Passover (also called the feast of unleavened bread), at Pentecost (the feast of weeks), and at the feast of tabernacles. These obedient Jews in Acts chapter 2 had therefore returned to Jerusalem from their respective countries for the feast of weeks (or Pentecost), as required by the Law.

Some Jews, though, lived far away from Jerusalem, and were unable to make the trip three times a year. Peter also makes an interesting statement concerning these Jews who were afar off, in Acts2:39 -

"For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call."

Peter's statement that the promise was unto "all" that were "afar off" was a reference to those scattered children of Israel. Since Peter later hesitated to associate with Uncircumcised Gentiles in Acts chapter 10, and even stated that it was "unlawful" for him to "come unto" them (Acts10:28), he was not referring to Uncircumcised Gentiles as being "afar off" in the above passage. In fact, other men of God in the Bible also make reference to the scattered children of Israel as being "far off", as Daniel did in his prayer of Dan.9:7 -

"O Lord, righteousness belongeth unto thee, but unto us confusion of faces, as at this day; to the men of Judah, and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and unto all Israel, that are near, and that are far off, through all the countries whither thou hast driven them, because of their trespass that they have trespassed against thee."

The Jews in Acts chapter 2, then, were descendants of the above mentioned Israelites, who had been driven "far off" because of their "trespass" against the Lord. As a result, due to Peter's later unwillingness to even associate with Cornelius (an Uncircumcised Gentile who blessed Israel in Acts chapter 10), we know Peter was not referring to Uncircumcised Gentiles today as receiving the promise from "afar off" in Acts2:39.

Chapter 10: Acts 10: The Salvation of Cornelius

In Acts chapter 10, the Lord sent Peter a vision of a great sheet let down to the earth, and filled with unclean beasts, in order to prepare him for his encounter with Uncircumcised Gentiles. Peter, though, initially refused these unclean beasts, according to Acts10:10-16 -

"And he became very hungry, and would have eaten: but while they made ready, he fell into a trance, And saw heaven opened, and a certain vessel descending unto him, as it had been a great sheet knit at the four corners, and let down to the earth: Wherein were all manner of fourfooted beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air. And there came a voice to him, Rise, Peter; kill, and eat. But Peter said, Not so, Lord; for I have never eaten any thing that is common or unclean. And the voice spake unto him again the second time, What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common. This was done thrice: and the vessel was received up again into heaven."

Up to this point, Peter and the other apostles had continued keeping the Law, having never been taught otherwise. In the vision, the Gentiles were represented by the unclean meats, and the Law forbade the Jews from eating unclean beasts (see, for example, Leviticus chapter 11). In fact, as we saw earlier, Israel's severance from the Gentiles was specifically represented by this dietary law concerning the eating of meats (Lev.20:26-27; see Section 7 above).

So, although Cornelius feared God and gave alms to the nation of Israel, he was still only an Uncircumcised Gentile. Since the Jews were required to remain separate from "the nations", Peter therefore considered Uncircumcised men such as Cornelius to be unclean, even if he did bless the nation of Israel. As a result, Peter hesitated to even associate with these unclean Gentiles, until the Lord Himself made it clear that they had been cleansed. We can therefore understand why Peter stated that his association with Uncircumcised Gentiles was "unlawful", in Acts 10:28-29 -

"And he said unto them, Ye know how that it is an unlawful thing for a man that is a Jew to keep company, or come unto one of another nation; but God hath shewed me that I should not call any man common or unclean. Therefore came I unto you without gainsaying, as soon as I was sent for: I ask therefore for what intent ye have sent for me?"

It is also important to note here that the Lord did not send Peter to these Gentiles with a specific message. This is evident from verse 29, since Peter actually had to ask these Gentiles what they wanted with him. Peter knew only the gospel which he had been preaching to Israel, which included circumcision. Thus, Peter knew that he was performing an unlawful act by going to Uncircumcised Gentiles. Peter therefore began to preach the word "which God sent unto the children of Israel" (Acts 10:36), but was interrupted when the Gentiles began to speak with tongues.

So once again, the above passage is not an example of Gentile salvation today, since we are now saved through the fall of Israel (Ro. 11:11). Yet Cornelius had clearly blessed the nation of Israel (as had the Gentiles in Matthew 15 and Luke 7), in order to receive the Lord's blessing. Therefore, instead of Cornelius being a picture of Gentile salvation today, the Lord was to use the above event for an entirely different purpose: As we shall see, Peter would refer to this event in defense of Paul's apostleship, in Acts 15:7-12.

In Acts chapter 10, Peter did not know that he was being prepared to defend another man's apostleship to the Gentiles, because Paul (the man who Peter was to defend) had been a steadfast persecutor of Jews who believed on the Lord Jesus Christ. Yet the Lord would still save Paul, and designate him as the apostle of the Gentiles (Ro. 11:13), instead of designating Peter. Consequently, Paul would later preach the gospel of the uncircumcision; while Peter would preach the gospel of the circumcision, as Paul states in Gal. 2:7-9 -

"But contrariwise, when they saw that the gospel of the uncircumcision was committed unto me, as the gospel of the circumcision was unto Peter; (For he that wrought effectually in Peter to the apostleship of the circumcision, the same was mighty in me toward the Gentiles:) And when James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that was given

unto me, they gave to me and Barnabas the right hands of fellowship; that we should go unto the heathen, and they unto the circumcision."

Accordingly, when Peter was sent to this Uncircumcised Gentile who blessed Israel, it was not because Cornelius was a picture of Gentile salvation today. Instead, Acts 15:7-12 states that Peter related this incident in order to justify Paul's apostleship to the Gentiles. In this sense, then, Acts chapter 10 can be considered a transitional passage, since it does contain the first account regarding the Lord's acceptance of Uncircumcised Gentiles. But since Cornelius was not saved through the fall of Israel, as Uncircumcised Gentiles are today, he was still not a picture of our salvation.

Moreover, when Peter stated in Acts 10:28 that it was "unlawful" for him to associate with "one of another nation", some Christians take this to mean that the Romans had some law that forbade the Jews from associating with Gentiles. Yet it is clear from the passage that Peter was referring to God's law of separation, due to his statement that he was not to call any man "common or unclean". The Jews themselves used these terms to describe the foods or associations that were forbidden by the Jewish Law (God's Law); so we know that Peter was not referring to the Roman law in Acts 10:28.

Chapter 11: Acts 3: Israel Still Remains "The Seed"

The Lord, then, had never informed the apostles that Uncircumcised Gentiles would ever be cleansed. Nor was the sanctification of Uncircumcised Gentiles the subject of any prophecy. Instead, even during the early portion of the book of Acts, Peter's understanding was that only Israel would receive the Lord's blessing directly, and that the nations of the earth would be blessed through Israel's exaltation.

Indeed, all of the Old Testament prophecies concerning the sanctification of the Gentiles actually affirm this fact, as well. Whenever any Gentiles allied themselves with Israel (for example, if they were to partake of the passover, as in Ex.12:48), they were always required to be circumcised. Otherwise, they were to be "cut off" (as in Gen.17:14). According to prophecy, then, the Gentile nations were required to forever seek the Lord through blessing the nation of Israel.

Even in Acts chapter 3, Israel was still the "seed" through whom all the nations of the earth would be blessed, as the Lord promised in Gen.26:4 and 28:14 (see Section 8). For example, after healing a lame man at the temple, Peter stated to the Jews that because they were still living in prophetic times, they were the "seed" through whom "all the kindreds of the earth" would be blessed, in Acts 3:24-26 -

"Yea, and all the prophets from Samuel and those that follow after, as many as have spoken, have likewise foretold of these days. Ye are the children of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with our fathers, saying unto Abraham, And in thy seed shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed. Unto you first God, having raised up his Son Jesus, sent him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities."

So according to the above passage, as far as Peter knew at the time, Israel was still the "seed" through whom all the nations would be blessed. After all, that is exactly what he states in verse 25. There is no indication here that Peter even suspected Christ was the Seed through Whom Uncircumcised Gentiles would one day be blessed, as Paul would later reveal in his epistles (Gal.3:16).

As a result, since the prophets had already foretold of those days; yet they had never mentioned the fact that Uncircumcised Gentiles would one day be sanctified, then we cannot be living in the prophetic times of Acts chapter 3. Instead, we are living in an unprophesied time period which Paul refers to as "the dispensation of the grace of God" (Eph.3:2).

Since Peter's statement in Acts 10:28 proves that he was not referring to Uncircumcised Gentiles as being included in the promise of Acts 2:39, then neither were Uncircumcised Gentiles to be included in any of his other early Acts sermons. In fact, Peter's understanding that Christ was a Saviour only to Israel is also reflected by his answer to the Jewish high priest, in Acts 5:30-32 -

"The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye slew and hanged on a tree. Him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins. And we are his witnesses of these things; and so is also the Holy Ghost, whom God hath given to them that obey him."

Once again, Peter only understood in the above passage that Christ would give repentance and forgiveness to Israel, if she repented. Peter never intended for Uncircumcised Gentiles to be included in this promise.

Chapter 12: The Great Commission, Being Prophetic, was Interrupted

A Dispensational approach to the scriptures will also explain a seeming discrepancy in the Lord's post-resurrection instructions to His apostles, in what is commonly known as the "Great Commission". Although He had previously commanded them to go only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel (Mt.10:5-7), the Lord later instructed His apostles to teach "all nations" (Mt.28:19-20).

The question therefore arises: Why did the apostles continue to confine their teaching to the nation of Israel during the early portion of the book of Acts (as we have already seen), if the Lord plainly sent them to teach "all nations" in Mt.28:19-20?.

The answer here lies in the fact that the apostles were not expected to immediately teach "all nations"; so they were not at all disobedient to the Lord's instructions in Mt.28:19-20. Instead, certain prophesied events were to occur first, after which the prophesied "gospel of the kingdom" would be preached in "all the world" (Mt.24:24). All Old Testament prophecies suggest that before the Lord will accept the Gentiles, the kingdom must first be restored to Israel. This restoration of the kingdom, though, had not yet occurred when the Lord sent the apostles out to teach "all nations" (Mt.29:19-20). And as we have already seen, Uncircumcised Gentiles were to be excluded from the prophesied kingdom (see Isaiah 52:1; Ezekiel 44:9, etc.).

The apostles, then, knowing that the prophesied sanctification of Gentiles must occur through the exaltation of Israel, had no reason to go directly to "all nations" in the "Great Commission". Instead, they expected the kingdom to first be "restored again to Israel", as their own words reflect in Acts1:6-8 -

"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."

The apostles' question in verse 6 above demonstrates their understanding that the prophesied kingdom must first be established, before the Gentiles could ever be made acceptable to the Lord. As a result, after the Lord restores the kingdom to Israel, the prophesied "gospel of the kingdom" will indeed be preached in "in all the world for a witness unto all nations" (Mt.24:14). At the time, then, the apostles were clearly confining their ministries to the nation of Israel alone.

Therefore, since the apostles would not have accepted Uncircumcised Gentiles among their converts, their purpose was to convert Jerusalem first (see Luke 24:47). Afterwards, they would convert Judaea, then Samaria, and then "the uttermost part of the earth", according to Acts 1:8 (above).

Even in Acts chapter 1, then, the apostles still did not know Uncircumcised Gentiles would be sanctified (as they are today). Yet the Lord had still sent them out on the "Great Commission of Mt.28:18-20 -

"And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen."

Since the prophesied kingdom had not yet been established, though, the apostles continued to confine their ministry to Israel alone (as we have seen in Sections 10 and 11), fully expecting the Jews to first repent.

In fact, the prophesied kingdom, with Israel at the head of the nations (Deut.28:10-13), and which had been foretold throughout the Old Testament, has yet to be established. The Lord has now stopped the prophetic clock due to Israel's unbelief. In its place, the Lord ushered in this present "dispensation of the grace of God" (Eph.3:2), thereby saving uncircumcised Gentiles through the fall of Israel.

During the early portion of the book of Acts, then, under the "Great Commission", the apostles were fully expecting the nation of Israel to repent before "the nations" would receive the prophesied "gospel of the kingdom". Another account of the "Great Commission", in which the Lord instructed His apostles to begin at Jerusalem, is found in Luke 24:44-47 -

"And he said unto them, These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me. Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures, 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 should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem."

Indeed, just as the Lord had instructed the apostles to do in verse 47 above, they actually did begin at Jerusalem (Acts2:5), fully expecting her to repent according to prophecy. However, since Israel as a nation failed to repent, the apostles never went beyond the nation of Israel to "all nations". Yet many Christians today still assume that they did so, without realizing that Israel as a nation had to first repent.

Had Jerusalem repented, though, the apostles were to next "witness" in Judaea, then in Samaria, and then in "the uttermost part of the earth" (Acts1:8). So, the Lord's above instructions to begin at Jerusalem (Luke 2:47) is in complete agreement with every Old Testament prophecy concerning the kingdom. According to these prophecies, Israel as a nation (and therefore Jerusalem, as well) must first believe before "the nations" can be converted. Only after the prophesied kingdom is established will "the nations" become acceptable to God, according to these Old Testament prophecies. Yet even then, the nations will still be required to come to Jerusalem in order to worship, according to prophecies such as Zech.8:20-23 -

"Thus saith the LORD of hosts; It shall yet come to pass, that there shall come people, and the inhabitants of many cities: And the inhabitants of one city shall go to another, saying, Let us go speedily to pray before the LORD, and to seek the LORD of hosts: I will go also. Yea, many people and strong nations shall come to seek the LORD of hosts in Jerusalem, and to pray before the LORD. Thus saith the LORD of hosts; In those days it shall come to pass, that ten men shall take hold out of all languages of the nations, even 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."

In the "last" days, then, "all nations" will come to Jerusalem to worship, as prophesied in Is.2:1-4 -

"The word that Isaiah the son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem. And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the LORD's house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it. And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. And he shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people: and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more."

According to verse 2 above, this prophesied kingdom will be established "in the last days", and all nations shall flow unto it. This prophecy is also repeated in Micah 4:1-3 -

"But in the last days it shall come to pass, that the mountain of the house of the LORD shall be established in the top of the mountains, and it shall be exalted above the hills; and people shall flow unto it. And many nations shall come, and say, Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, and to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for the law shall go forth of Zion, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. And he shall judge among many people, and rebuke strong nations afar off; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up a sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more."

Peter, understanding that the prophesied kingdom was to be established "in the last days" (verse 1 above), therefore proclaimed that those prophesied "last days" had actually begun, in Acts 2:16-21 -

"But this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel; And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams: And on my servants and on my handmaidens I will pour out in those days of my Spirit; and they

shall prophesy: And I will shew wonders in heaven above, and signs in the earth beneath; blood, and fire, and vapour of smoke: The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before that great and notable day of the Lord come: And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved."

In the above passage, when proclaiming that the prophesied "last days" had already begun, Peter then quotes a prophecy from the Old Testament book of Joel (see Joel 2:28-32). This prophecy concerning those "last days", then, was actually being fulfilled at that time, according to Peter's above statement in verse 16 ("this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel").

Peter, then, was fully expecting Jerusalem to repent, as had been prophesied, before continuing on to witness in "all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth." (Acts 1:8). Beginning in Jerusalem, then, as they had been instructed to do (Luke 24:47), the apostles obediently continued preaching the prophesied "gospel of the kingdom" during the early portion of the book of Acts, as the Lord had also instructed them in Mt.24:14-16 -

"And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come. When ye therefore shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stand in the holy place, (whoso readeth, let him understand:) Then let them which be in Judaea flee into the mountains:"

Consequently, the apostles were fully obedient in preaching the prophesied "gospel of the kingdom" during the early portion of the book of Acts, and actually began at Jerusalem (just as the Lord had commanded them in Luke 24:47). However, according to Mt.24:45 (above), the next event that was prophesied to occur was the fact that the "abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet" would stand in "the holy place". But since this event has not yet taken place; yet the Lord is now saving Uncircumcised Gentiles by grace through faith (which had never been mentioned in prophecy), the Lord has evidently interrupted His prophetic plan, and ushered in the unprophesied "dispensation of the grace of God" (Eph.3:2). Therefore, Peter, James, and John later agreed to confine their own ministries to "the circumcision" (Gal.2:7-9), preaching the "gospel of the circumcision" to "the circumcision" (the nation of Israel).

However, since Uncircumcised Gentiles were never offered hope through the "Great Commission" that Peter, James, and John were given, the Lord has therefore interrupted prophecy by designating the apostle Paul as "the apostle of the Gentiles" (Ro.11:13), and has committing "the gospel of the uncircumcision" unto Paul alone (Gal.2:7). All of the above prophecies concerning the kingdom will indeed be fulfilled, but their fulfillment has been postponed for the time being. According to prophecy, Israel must first repent. Today, then, Uncircumcised Gentiles have hope through the shed blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. Yet such a

possibility was never mentioned in the Old Testament scriptures, nor in the "Great Commission".

Chapter 13: Dispensation of Grace: Prophecy Interrupted & the Mystery Begins

During this present dispensation of the grace of God, in which Uncircumcised Gentiles can now be saved, the apostle Paul refers to a certain event as "the mystery" (Ro.16:25; Eph.3:2-3; Col.1:27). Although many different "mysteries" are mentioned in the Bible, it is important to note that during the earthly ministry of Christ, the 12 apostles did not understand this "revelation of the mystery" that Paul later received.

For example, the Lord had previously told His apostles that it was given to them to know "the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven" (Mt.13:11), and to know "the mystery of the kingdom of God" (Mk.4:11). Yet the apostles, for all their given knowledge, still failed to realize that Uncircumcised Gentiles could ever be saved. As a result, the "mystery" which was later revealed to Paul (which Peter, James, and John did not know) cannot be among the "the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven", which they did know.

Instead, the mystery that was revealed to Paul concerned the fact that Uncircumcised Gentiles are now saved through the "fall" of Israel (again, see Ro.11:11), rather than through Israel's prophesied exaltation. Since the salvation of Uncircumcised Gentiles was never prophesied (see section 6 of this study), this salvation was indeed a mystery that was kept hidden "in God" (Eph.3:9) until it was revealed to the apostle Paul.

It was no mystery, though, that the Lord would some day "scatter" the children of Israel, due to their continual disobedience. Nor was it a mystery that He would temporarily forsake the nation of Israel, prior to the establishment of His prophesied kingdom. Indeed, the Lord's temporary forsaking of Israel was clearly prophesied in passages such as Is.54:6-8 -

"For the LORD hath called thee as a woman forsaken and grieved in spirit, and a wife of youth, when thou wast refused, saith thy God. For a small moment have I forsaken thee; but with great mercies will I gather thee. In a little wrath I hid my face from thee for a moment; but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee, saith the LORD thy Redeemer."

In fulfillment of the first portion of Isaiah 54:7, the Lord has temporarily "forsaken" the nation of Israel today, just as He said He would. The unprophesied result, though (the mystery), is that Uncircumcised Gentiles are now saved through this prophesied "fall" of Israel (as Paul explains in Ro.11:11). And as we have already seen, this present "dispensation of the grace of God" (Eph.3:2) was never prophesied. Although this dispensation of grace is the result of prophecy, it

was never the actual subject of prophecy. Accordingly, through the prophesied fall of Israel, the Lord is now operating outside of the prophesied design that He described in the Old Testament scriptures.

The above passage of Isaiah 54:7, then, is one example of a prophecy that has been interrupted by this present dispensation of grace. The first portion of the prophecy has been fulfilled, since the Lord has temporarily "forsaken" Israel. This also applies to the first portion of verse 8, since the Lord has also hidden His face from Israel "for a moment". But the second part of verse 7, as well as the second part of verse 8, have yet to be fulfilled. At some future point in time, the Lord will indeed "gather" Israel (Deut.30:3-4) from among the nations, and will "have mercy" upon her (Psalms 102:13).

Israel's backsliding was clearly prophesied, and her future restoration foretold, in many other Old Testament scriptures, as well. In each of these scriptures, though, the "mystery" of which Paul writes (concerning the salvation of Uncircumcised Gentiles through the "fall" of Israel) is not even alluded to. As long as the Lord dealt with Israel according to prophecy, it was incomprehensible that He would ever save Uncircumcised Gentiles, as He is doing today. There will therefore come a time in the future when the Lord will end this present dispensation of grace. At that point, His "prophetic clock", so to speak, will again resume ticking. There are, in fact, several prophecies which began to be fulfilled, before the Lord stopped His "prophetic clock" with this present dispensation of grace. Such partially fulfilled prophecies also serve as further proof that prophecy has indeed been temporarily halted for the present. If these prophecies are to be completed, the Lord must again start His prophetic clock at some point in the future. Isaiah, for example, wrote concerning the "year of the LORD" (which has been fulfilled already) and the "day of vengeance" (the future tribulation) as if both events were either consecutive, or possibly simultaneous, in Is.61:1-2 -

"The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me; because the LORD hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound; To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all that mourn;"

When Isaiah made the above prophecy, or even when the Old Testament believer read the passage, there was no indication whatsoever that there would be an unprophesied break of over 2000 years between the "year of the LORD" and the "day of vengeance", which are both mentioned in verse 2. Yet this has indeed been the case. When Christ read the above passage in the synagogue, He stopped in the middle of Isaiah 61:2, thereby proclaiming only the "year of the LORD" as being fulfilled in Luke 4:16-21 -

"And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up: and, as his custom was, he went into the synagogue on the sabbath day, and stood up for to read. And there was delivered unto him the book of the prophet Esaias. And when he had opened the book, he found the place where it was written, The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, To preach the acceptable year of the Lord. And he closed the book, and he gave it again to the minister, and sat down. And the eyes of all them that were in the synagogue were fastened on him. And he began to say unto them, This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears."

According to Luke 4:21 above, the scripture that the Lord read was fulfilled that day in the synagogue. Yet when He read Is.61:1-2, He never proclaimed the second half of Isaiah 61:2, which concerns "the day of vengeance". Instead, according to Luke 4:19-20 above, He only preached "the acceptable year of the LORD" and stopped, closing the book. Since the "day of vengeance" in Is.61:2 was still a future event, the Lord proclaimed only "the acceptable year of the LORD" as being fulfilled. Nor did the Lord ever give any indication that Uncircumcised Gentiles would be saved before the "day of vengeance" was to occur. Neither Isaiah's prophecy, nor even the Lord Himself, ever hinted that this present dispensation of grace would be inserted between "the acceptable year of the LORD" and "the day of vengeance".

Although Luke 4:16-21 is only one example of how prophecy has been interrupted, the passage does prove that the Lord could very well interrupt His prophetic program (as He is doing today with the salvation of Uncircumcised Gentiles) without having foretold that He would do so. In fact, several other partially fulfilled prophecies (which have all been interrupted) can be found in the New Testament, as well. On the day of Pentecost, for example, when the disciples began to speak with other tongues, Peter proclaimed that Joel's prophecy concerning the "last days" was being fulfilled at that time, according to Acts 2:16-21 -

"But this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel; And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams: And on my servants and on my handmaidens I will pour out in those days of my Spirit; and they shall prophesy: And I will shew wonders in heaven above, and signs in the earth beneath; blood, and fire, and vapour of smoke: The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before that great and notable day of the Lord come: And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved."

Much of Joel's prophecy that Peter quoted, though, still has not been fulfilled, even today. Once again, the Lord interrupted the prophecy with this present dispensation of grace, and in Acts chapter 2 fulfilled only the first portion of Joel 2:28-32 -

"And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions: And also upon the servants and upon the handmaids in those days will I pour out my spirit. And I will shew wonders in the heavens and in the earth, blood, and fire, and pillars of smoke. The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and the terrible day of the LORD come. And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the LORD shall be delivered: for in mount Zion and in Jerusalem shall be deliverance, as the LORD hath said, and in the remnant whom the LORD shall call."

The Lord, then, has temporarily interrupted Joel's above prophecy with this present dispensation of the grace of God, in giving the revelation of "the mystery" to the apostle Paul (Eph.3:2-3). As a result, the remainder of Joel's prophecy, with the sun being turned into darkness and the moon into blood before the "day of the LORD" occurs, has not yet taken place. In Acts 2:16-21, then, when Peter stated that "your" sons and "your" daughters would prophesy, "your" young men would see visions, and "your" old men would dream dreams, he was referring to the believing Jews in Israel (see Acts 2:5), and not to Uncircumcised Gentiles in the church today. Joel's prophecy is therefore not being fulfilled at this time. At some point in the future, though, when prophecy is actually resumed, the passage does indeed stand to be literally fulfilled, according to the dispensational viewpoint.

Yet another prophecy which remains only partially fulfilled is found in Daniel 9:24-27 -

"Seventy weeks are determined upon thy people and upon thy holy city, to finish the transgression, and to make an end of sins, and to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness, and to seal up the vision and prophecy, and to anoint the most Holy. Know therefore and understand, that from the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem unto the Messiah the Prince shall be seven weeks, and threescore and two weeks: the street shall be built again, and the wall, even in troublous times. And after threescore and two weeks shall Messiah be cut off, but not for himself: and the people of the prince that shall come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary; and the end thereof shall be with a flood, and unto the end of the war desolations are determined. And he shall confirm the covenant with many for one week: and in the midst of the week he shall cause the sacrifice and the oblation to cease, and for the overspreading of abominations he shall make it desolate, even until the consummation, and that determined shall be poured upon the desolate."

In the above passage, 70 "weeks" are determined upon "thy people" (the nation of Israel), and upon "thy holy city" (Jerusalem). While an analysis of the passage is beyond the scope of this study, a brief overview shows that 69 of the 70 "weeks" have been fulfilled; yet the final "week" has not yet occurred. In the Old Testament scriptures, a seven year period is sometimes

referred to as a "week". For example, when Jacob worked for seven years to receive Laban's daughter (Rachel) as his wife, the Bible states that Jacob "fulfilled her week" (Gen.29:27-28). Likewise, Daniel's prophesied "seventy weeks" cover 70 "weeks" of years, or 70 times 7 years, since one "week" is equal to seven years. Daniel's seventy weeks, then, cover a total of 490 years, which were to be fulfilled in Jerusalem. Indeed, the "seven weeks, and threescore and two weeks" (or 69 "weeks" of years) unto "Messiah the Prince" (verse 25) were fulfilled before the Lord's crucifixion, which means that 483 years transpired between the prophesied "going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem" and "Messiah the Prince" (verse 25). Although 69 "weeks" of years (483 years) were fulfilled, though, this prophetic "clock" again stopped after the crucifixion of our Lord. The remaining "one week" of years (seven years) in verse 27, which covers the future tribulation period, has yet to be fulfilled. When prophecy again resumes, then, this final "week" will also be the prophesied "day of vengeance" that Isaiah also mentions in Is.61:2. So again, the Lord inserted the unprophesied dispensation of grace, in which we presently live, between Daniel's prophesied 69th and 70th weeks.

In fact, the unprophesied mystery to which Paul refers in Eph.3:1-6 (which concerns the dispensation of grace, in which Uncircumcised Gentiles can now be saved) can be compared to a parenthesis in a sentence, with God's prophesied plan for Israel represented by the words outside of the parenthesis. This sentence still makes perfect sense even if the parenthesis is removed, because the parenthesis (which will represent the mystery) was added to the sentence, in order to further explain it. In the same way, God's prophesied plan for Israel would still hold true even if the mystery (the salvation of Uncircumcised Gentiles through the fall of Israel) was removed, since the mystery was added once the Lord halted His prophetic "clock".

We know that the "fellowship of the mystery" was never prophesied, since Paul states that it was previously "hid" in God, and that he was given the task of revealing it to the Gentiles, in Eph.3:8-10 -

"Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ; And to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ: To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God,"

The above passage is further proof that the "mystery" was not part of prophecy, since Paul states in verse 9 that it was hid in God. Please note, the mystery was not hidden "in prophecy". Yet the things Peter preached during the book of Acts had not been hidden in God. Instead, Peter understood that the events he was witnessing were the fulfillment of prophecy, as he stated in Acts 3:18-21 -

"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."

Peter then states that all the prophets since Samuel had foretold of those days, in Acts 3:24-26

"Yea, and all the prophets from Samuel and those that follow after, as many as have spoken, have likewise foretold of these days. Ye are the children of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with our fathers, saying unto Abraham, And in thy seed shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed. Unto you first God, having raised up his Son Jesus, sent him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities."

There is a great difference, then, between the events which occurred in the book of Acts (which had been "foretold" by the prophets, according to Acts 3:24 above) and the "mystery" to which Paul refers, which had been previously hidden in God. By contrasting the mystery with prophecy, we now have even more proof that the Lord has temporarily stopped His prophetic "clock" today, and is now performing the unprophesied act of saving Uncircumcised Gentiles through the fall of Israel (again, see Ro.11:11). And although there are other examples, those mentioned above should be sufficient to illustrate the fact that prophecy has presently been interrupted by the salvation of Uncircumcised Gentiles. Only Paul refers to the "mystery" that the Lord is now performing during the dispensation of the grace of God (Eph.3:2-3). And while there are many mysteries contained in the Bible, we currently live in the only time period which is referred to as a "mystery", and which is the result of Israel's blindness, as Paul states in Ro.11:25 -

"For I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits; that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in."

Chapter 14: The Grecians of Acts 6 & 11

In Acts chapter 6, the Grecians are mentioned for the first time. Although it is only natural to assume that the Grecians were Gentiles, it is also a mistake for us to make such an assumption. In reality, these Grecians were actually Greek speaking Jews, not Gentiles. In view of Peter's later unwillingness to associate with Gentiles in Acts chapter 10, we know that the Grecians of Acts chapter 6, with whom the apostles did associate, could not have been Gentiles. Otherwise,

Peter would have been a hypocrite indeed to tell Cornelius in Acts 10:28 that it was "unlawful" for him (a Jew) to associate with "one of another nation" (a Gentile), if he had earlier associated with Gentiles in Acts chapter 6.

So, because a vision was required as late as Acts 10 before Peter could understand that the Gentiles had also been cleansed, there was no way he would have known this earlier in Acts chapter 6. The Grecians, then, were simply Greek speaking Jews who, except for their Hebrew ancestry and religion, were indistinguishable from the Pagan Greeks. As a result, although it was "unlawful" for the Jews to associate with Gentiles (see Acts 10:28), the apostles did associate with the Jewish Grecians at that time, according to 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 ministrations."

Even as late as Acts chapter 11, the disciples (who were "scattered abroad" after Stephen was stoned in Acts chapter 7) were still preaching the word only to the Jews, according to Acts 11:19-20 -

"Now they which were scattered abroad upon the persecution that arose about Stephen travelled as far as Phenice, and Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word to none but unto the Jews only. And some of them were men of Cyprus and Cyrene, which, when they were come to Antioch, spake unto the Grecians, preaching the Lord Jesus."

The Grecians, then, were not Gentile believers. As a result, the apostles still continued to separate themselves from the Gentiles, and confined their ministry to the nation of Israel during the early portion of the book of Acts, as we have already seen (and as the Lord had commanded them to do in Mt. 10:5-7).

Chapter 15: The Book of James was Not Written to Gentiles

The apostles' separation from the Gentiles is clear from the book of James, as well, because he specifically addressed his epistle to Israel's "twelve tribes which are scattered abroad", according to James 1:1 -

"James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad, greeting."

We would therefore have to "spiritualize" these twelve tribes in James 1:1 if we wish to make Gentiles even fit into James' intended audience. However, spiritualizing only select passages,

such as James 1:1, creates great confusion, if other portions of the epistle are still taken literally (and they are indeed taken quite literally by many believers today). The problem then becomes a subjective one: Who is to determine which passages to spiritualize, and which ones to take literally? For example: If James 1:1 is to be "spiritualized" to include Gentiles, then why shouldn't James chapter 2 be "spiritualized", as well?

Plus, in addition to James' statement that he was writing to "the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad", he also made a binding agreement with Peter, John, and Paul to confine his ministry to "the circumcision" (the children of Israel). By contrast, though, Paul (who refers to himself as "the minister of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles" in Ro.15:16) was to go unto "the heathen" along with Barnabas, as we see in Gal.2:7-9 -

"But contrariwise, when they saw that the gospel of the uncircumcision was committed unto me, as the gospel of the circumcision was unto Peter; (For he that wrought effectually in Peter to the apostleship of the circumcision, the same was mighty in me toward the Gentiles:) And when James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that was given unto me, they gave to me and Barnabas the right hands of fellowship; that we should go unto the heathen, and they unto the circumcision."

In verse 7 above, Paul clearly made a distinction between the gospel of the UNcircumcision that had been committed unto him, and the gospel of the circumcision that Peter, James, and John were preaching. As a result, Paul and Barnabas were to go unto "the heathen", according to verse 9. And Peter, unto whom the gospel of the circumcision was committed, agreed to go unto "the circumcision", with James and John.

When these apostles therefore extended "the right hands of fellowship" to Paul and Barnabas, they bound the agreement, because the Lord Himself had previously agreed to support any such binding agreement these apostles made. Indeed, He had given Peter the authority to make such agreements, in Mt.16:18-19 -

"And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven."

In addition, the power to bind on earth had also been granted to the rest of the disciples, as well (Mt.18:18). As a result, Peter (having the God-given authority to do so) bound Paul and Barnabas to go specifically to the heathen with the gospel of the uncircumcision. By doing so, Peter also bound James, John, and himself to confine their ministry to the circumcision saints.

Therefore, in view of the fact that Peter, James, and John agreed to "go unto the circumcision" (Gal.2:7-9), and since James confirms this by the fact that he wrote his epistle specifically to the 12 tribes of Israel (as he states in James 1:1), this also means that Peter, Jude, and John must have written their epistles to "the circumcision" (i.e., the twelve tribes of Israel), as well.

As a side note, it should be mentioned that the authorship of the book of James is still disputed, and will probably never be resolved to everyone's satisfaction. At least three different apostles are named James in the New Testament scriptures. In the book of Galatians, Paul refers to "James the Lord's brother" as an apostle (Gal.1:19), and states that James was with Peter and John when they agreed to confine their ministry to the circumcision (Gal.2:7-9). By comparing Paul's statements in Gal.1:19 and 2:7-9 with James 1:1, it is possible that "James the Lord's brother" wrote the epistle that bears his name.

However, there were also two other apostles named James, as well. One was the brother of John, the son of Zebedee (Mt.10:2), whom Herod killed with the sword (Acts 12:1-2). Likewise, there was also an apostle named James who was "the son of Alphaeus" (Mt.10:3). And indeed, one of these three apostles named James also had a brother named Jude, who wrote the epistle of Jude (see Jude 1:1).

Although this is not a common view, it is still possible that the epistle of James could have been written by "James the brother of John", whom Herod killed with the sword in Acts 12:2. If this is the case, it would explain why his epistle states that "faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone" (James 2:17); "faith without works is dead" (2:20); "by works a man is justified, and not by faith only" (2:24); etc. While the epistle of James seems to be lacking in much of the doctrine that is in Paul's epistles, it is obvious that Peter and John both included doctrines in their epistles that they learned from Paul (for example, compare 1 Pet. 1:18-19 to Peter's sermons during the book of Acts). So, because "James the brother of John" was killed before Paul received his revelation from the Lord, this would explain why the epistle of James says these things, if he was the one who wrote it. "James the brother of John" died before he could learn the truths that Peter and John apparently learned (directly or indirectly) from the apostle Paul.

In any case, no matter which James wrote the epistle, his statement that the twelve tribes were "scattered abroad" (James 1:1) also matches the events recorded in Acts 8:1-4, which states that the church at Jerusalem was "scattered abroad" after the stoning of Stephen (compare Acts 11:19). In addition, this also agrees with the Lord's words at the "last supper". At that time, He quoted a prophecy which stated that the sheep of the flock would be "scattered abroad" upon His crucifixion, in Mt.26:31 -

"Then saith Jesus unto them, All ye shall be offended because of me this night: for it is written, I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered abroad."

The above prophecy which the Lord quoted comes from Zech.13:7-9 -

"Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, and against the man that is my fellow, saith the LORD of hosts: smite the shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered: and I will turn mine hand upon the little ones. And it shall come to pass, that in all the land, saith the LORD, two parts therein shall be cut off and die; but the third shall be left therein. And I will bring the third part through the fire, and will refine them as silver is refined, and will try them as gold is tried: they shall call on my name, and I will hear them: I will say, It is my people: and they shall say, The LORD is my God."

In fact, Mark also records the Lord's quotation of the above prophecy, in Mk.14:27. According to this prophecy, then, "the sheep" (i.e., the nation of Israel) would be scattered upon the Lord's crucifixion, and one third of them would be brought "through the fire" (compare Mt.3:11; Luke 12:49). As a result, since James wrote his epistle to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad, the Gentiles were not among his intended audience. To avoid doctrinal confusion, then, we should accept the book of James as it is, and simply allow it to say exactly what it says, to whom it was written (the twelve tribes of Israel). We should neither spiritualize the first verse, nor James chapter 2, nor the rest of the epistle.

Chapter 16: The Apostle Paul: 14 Passages of Authenticity

In spite of all the evidence given above, there will still be those who insist upon following the teachings of the Lord while He was upon this earth. However, the Lord Himself - Whose teachings they are trying to follow - makes an interesting statement regarding those who reject His spokesman. In order for anyone to receive Him, they must first receive His messenger, as He states in John 13:20 -

"Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that receiveth whomsoever I send receiveth me; and he that receiveth me receiveth him that sent me."

The warning here is obvious. If anyone is to receive the Lord Jesus Christ, he must do so through the Lord's chosen messenger. And the Bible states in at least 14 different places that Paul was the apostle through whom the Lord spoke to the Gentiles, just as Christ was sent to Israel

Here, then, are 14 passages which specifically name Paul as the Lord's messenger to the Gentiles:

#1. First, the Lord tells Ananias in a vision that He has chosen Paul to go to the Gentiles, in Acts 9:15 -

"But the Lord said unto him, 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:"

#2. Later, in front of an angry mob in Jerusalem, Paul also relates how the Lord chose him specifically to minister to the Gentiles, in Acts 22:21 -

"And he said unto me, Depart: for I will send thee far hence unto the Gentiles."

#3. When Paul later defends himself before Agrippa, he describes the circumstances surrounding his conversion. In doing so, he again relates the Lord's promise to send him to the Gentiles, in Acts 26:15-18 -

"And I said, Who art thou, Lord? And he said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest. But rise, and stand upon thy feet: for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee; Delivering thee from the people, and from the Gentiles, unto whom now I send thee, To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me."

#4. In Acts 13, Paul and Barnabas reprimanded the unbelieving Jews in Antioch. This was Paul's first recorded sermon in the Bible, in which he also emphasized his ministry to the Gentiles, in Acts 13:46-47 -

"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. For so hath the Lord commanded us, saying, I have set thee to be a light of the Gentiles, that thou shouldst be for salvation unto the ends of the earth."

#5. After the Jews in Corinth rejected his message, Paul again stressed his Gentile ministry, in Acts 18:6 -

"And when they opposed themselves, and blasphemed, he shook his raiment, and said unto them, Your blood be upon your own heads; I am clean: from henceforth I will go unto the Gentiles."

#6. Paul's Gentile apostleship is also obvious throughout his written epistles. For instance, Paul specifically claims to be "the" apostle of the Gentiles in Ro. 11:13 -

"For I speak to you Gentiles, inasmuch as I am the apostle of the Gentiles, I magnify mine office:"

#7. Paul again emphasizes his calling as "the" minister of Christ to the Gentiles in Ro. 15:15-16 -

"Nevertheless, brethren, I have written the more boldly unto you in some sort, as putting you in mind, because of the grace that is given to me of God, That I should be the minister of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles, ministering the gospel of God, that the offering up of the Gentiles might be acceptable, being sanctified by the Holy Ghost."

By contrast, it is interesting to note that in this same chapter, Paul states that Christ's ministered to "the circumcision" (Israel), in Ro. 15:8 -

"Now I say that Jesus Christ was a minister of the circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises made unto the fathers:"

#8. Another passage that demonstrates Paul's unique apostleship to the Gentiles, in which he distinguishes between the gospel he was preaching and the gospel the other apostles were preaching, is Gal. 2:7-9 -

"But contrariwise, when they saw that the gospel of the uncircumcision was committed unto me, as the gospel of the circumcision was unto Peter; (For he that wrought effectually in Peter to the apostleship of the circumcision, the same was mighty in me toward the Gentiles:) And when James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that was given unto me, they gave to me and Barnabas the right hands of fellowship; that we should go unto the heathen, and they unto the circumcision."

#9. Even in his prison epistles (written after the events recorded in the book of Acts), Paul continues to emphasize his ministry to the Gentiles, as in Eph. 3:1-2 -

"For this cause I Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles, If ye have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which is given me to you-ward:"

#10. Paul states that he preached the "unsearchable riches of Christ" among the Gentiles, in Eph. 3:8-9 -

"Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ; And to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ:"

#11. It is also important to note that Paul never claimed to be the Lord's "only" minister to the Gentiles. To make such a claim would be foolish, since others (such as Barnabas) ministered

with him. Paul was, however, the only apostle the Lord sent to the Gentiles with a specific message. We can therefore understand why Paul would lay claim to being "the" apostle of the Gentiles, as in Ro. 11:13. Since the dispensation of God was given to Paul, he again emphasizes his gentile ministry in Col. 1:25-27 -

"Whereof I am made a minister, according to the dispensation of God which is given to me for you, to fulfil the word of God; Even the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to his saints: To whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory:"

#12. In view of the fact that the 12 apostles confined their ministries to the nation of Israel, Paul is also the only writer in the Bible who claims to be a "teacher" of the Gentiles, in 1 Tim. 2:7 -

"Whereunto I am ordained a preacher, and an apostle, (I speak the truth in Christ, and lie not;) a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and verity."

#13. Later, Paul again states that he is a "teacher" of the Gentiles, in 2 Tim. 1:11 -

"Whereunto I am appointed a preacher, and an apostle, and a teacher of the Gentiles."

#14. In this same epistle - probably written just prior to Paul's death - it is clear that his ministry to the Gentiles has been successful (2 Tim. 4:7-8). Paul's final victory as the Lord's messenger to the Gentiles is also obvious from 2 Tim. 4:17 -

"Notwithstanding the Lord stood with me, and strengthened me; that by me the preaching might be fully known, and that all the Gentiles might hear: and I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion."

The above 14 passages, then, show that Paul was "the" spokesman to the Gentiles for Christ. Coupled with the Lord's previous statement in John 13:20, it is clear that that we must receive His messenger by following Paul's doctrine, in order to receive the Lord Himself.

In addition, as the apostle of the Gentiles, Paul repeatedly instructs us to follow him, as in 1 Cor. 4:15-16 -

"For though ye have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet have ye not many fathers: for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel. Wherefore I beseech you, be ye followers of me."

Paul also instructs the Gentiles to follow him "as" he followed Christ, in 1 Cor. 11:1 -

"Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ."

Yet some believers might interpret Paul's instructions to follow him as meaning that we have permission to perform certain religious acts that Paul performed, such as water baptism. Such an interpretation, though, would give us permission to follow Paul "after the flesh". Therefore, such an interpretation of the above passages cannot be accurate. Paul wrote his epistles by inspiration of God (2 Tim. 3:16; 1 Cor. 14:37), but the religious acts he performed of his own free will were never inspired - and we need only to read the book of Acts in order to see this. For instance, after arguing successfully that circumcision is no longer necessary in Acts 15:1-12, Paul later circumcised Timothy, in Acts 16:1-3. In addition, after writing that Jews and Gentiles alike sacrifice to idols (1 Cor. 10:18-21), Paul took a Jewish vow that required animal sacrifices, in Acts 21:18-27. Nor was the gospel that Paul preached associated with water baptism (1 Cor. 1:17-18); but Paul still baptized certain individuals.

So, we cannot claim that it is permissible to perform the same religious acts that Paul performed, simply because he instructs us to follow him. Instead, we are to follow him "as" he followed Christ. In order to do so, we must follow the doctrine which Paul wrote by inspiration, as he states in Ro. 16:17-18 -

"Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them. For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple."

It should also be noted here that the things Paul wrote were the "commandments" of the Lord, as he states in 1 Cor. 14:37. If we wish to faithfully serve the Lord Jesus Christ, we should never follow those who place undue emphasis on His earthly ministry to Israel - no matter how sincere they may be, and no matter how convincing they may sound. Instead, we are to focus upon the doctrines Paul wrote in his epistles, as he states in Phil. 3:17-19 -

"Brethren, be followers together of me, and mark them which walk so as ye have us for an ensample. (For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ: Whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things.)"

In fact, the "enemies of the cross of Christ " (verse 18 above) are not limited to unsaved people alone. Such enemies also include religious people who walk contrary to Paul's example, and who therefore attempt to impose teachings and promises which the Lord gave only to Israel. If we truly wish to serve the Lord, we must do so by following the teachings which Paul alone

wrote to us by inspiration. Those who attempt to do otherwise, no matter how sincere they may be, are in fact only "minding earthly things" (verse 19 above).

Even the manner in which Paul was saved is the pattern for Gentile salvation today. Paul was the first person in whom the Lord shewed forth "all longsuffering" (or patience), as he states in 1 Tim. 1:16 -

"Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might shew forth all longsuffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting."

According to the above passage, the Lord had never before shewed forth "all longsuffering" prior to saving Paul. Instead, Paul's experience was a pattern for our salvation, when we believed on Christ. In view of John 13:20, if we are to receive the Lord Jesus Christ as our Saviour today, we must receive Him through the messenger He sent, and we must believe the gospel His messenger preached.

Further information concerning mid-Acts Dispensationalism can also be found in the study on Baptism: A Mid-Acts Dispensational Viewpoint.