

Lesson 21- The Apostles Speak to Israel

The book of Acts follows the books of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John in the Bible. The book of Acts is like a sequel to the four gospels in that it tells what happened after those books. What happened to Israel after Jesus Christ rose from the dead and ascended into heaven? What did the apostles do? Did the apostles complete the commission given to them by Christ? We encourage you to read the entire book of Acts to find the answer to these and many other questions you may have. However, in these studies we will again focus on the same areas we have studied in the preceding lessons.

These are the questions we will concentrate on: Was the nation of Israel still under the Law after Christ died, rose from the dead, and ascended into heaven? Was Israel still God's favoured nation? Were they still looking for a kingdom on earth? What gospel did they preach?

The Law

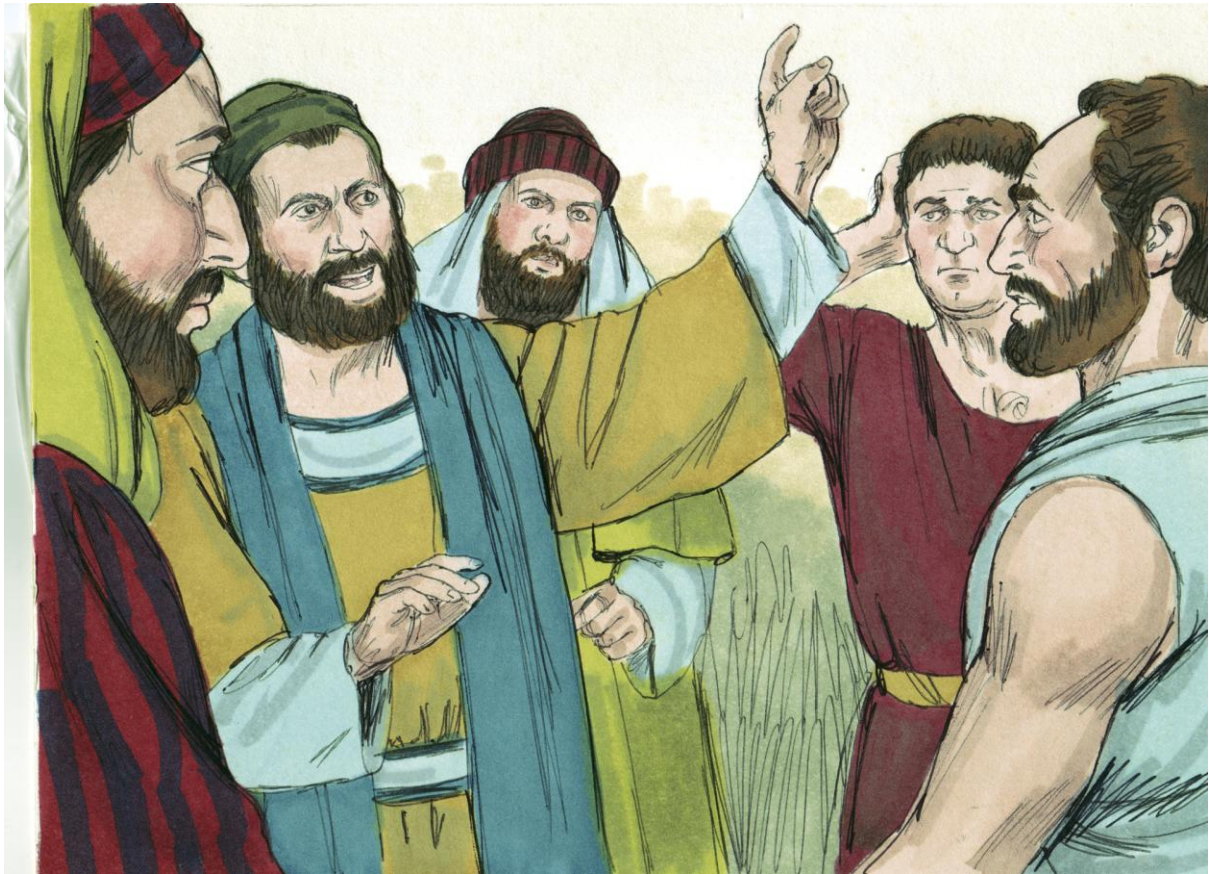
We have seen that God gave the Law to the nation of Israel in the Old Testament. This included such practices as the sacrificing of animals, circumcision, keeping the Sabbath Day, observing certain feast days, etc. We have also seen that Israel continued to live under this Law during the time written of in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. When the book of Acts begins, Jesus Christ has already died on the cross and risen from the dead. In chapter one of Acts He ascends into heaven.

Did the nation of Israel still live under the Law after the death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ? Or did Israel now begin to live under grace and not under the Law as spoken of in Romans 6:14?

Many churches teach that the disciples were living under grace after Christ died. However, let us see how the book of Acts answers our question. We will concentrate mostly on the first seven chapters of the book of Acts at this time (the reason for this will be explained later), though we may briefly refer to chapters 8-28. First we should observe that nowhere in the first seven chapters of Acts does it say that Israel no longer lived under the Law. Since they had been living under the Law for hundreds of years, we would expect the Bible to tell us if there had been such a major change in Israel. However, there is not even a hint that the Law had been set aside or replaced by grace.

On the other hand, there is considerable evidence that Israel was still living under the Law. We read in Acts 2:46 that they were "continuing daily with one accord in the temple . . ." and in Acts 3:1 we read "Now Peter and John went up together into the temple at the hour of prayer, being the ninth hour." Thus, we see that the apostles did not begin to build Christian churches to worship in, but continued to worship daily in the Jewish temple in Jerusalem.

In Acts chapter fifteen we read about a dispute that arose concerning the Law. Some were teaching, "Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved" (verse 1). Paul and Barnabas were accused of teaching that the Gentiles did not have to live under the Law of Moses. "And the apostles and elders came together for to consider of this matter" (Acts 15:6).



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In this brief study we cannot write in detail about Acts chapter fifteen. However, we want to point out a few relevant facts.

- 1) In Acts 15, the debate was about whether the Gentiles had to live under the Law. They did not discuss the question of whether the Jews had to live under the Law. Of course, the Jews must obey the Law! Everyone agreed on this point.
- 2) If Peter and the other apostles began to teach in Acts 2 that "ye are not under the law, but under grace," there surely would have been no dispute on this matter much later in Acts 15. When the Jews heard Paul and Barnabas preach they would have said, "This is the same thing

Peter has been preaching since the Day of Pentecost (in Acts 2)." However, there was a great controversy about this issue (Acts 15:1-7). Clearly Peter and the others had not previously taught that the Gentiles were under grace, instead of being under the Law.

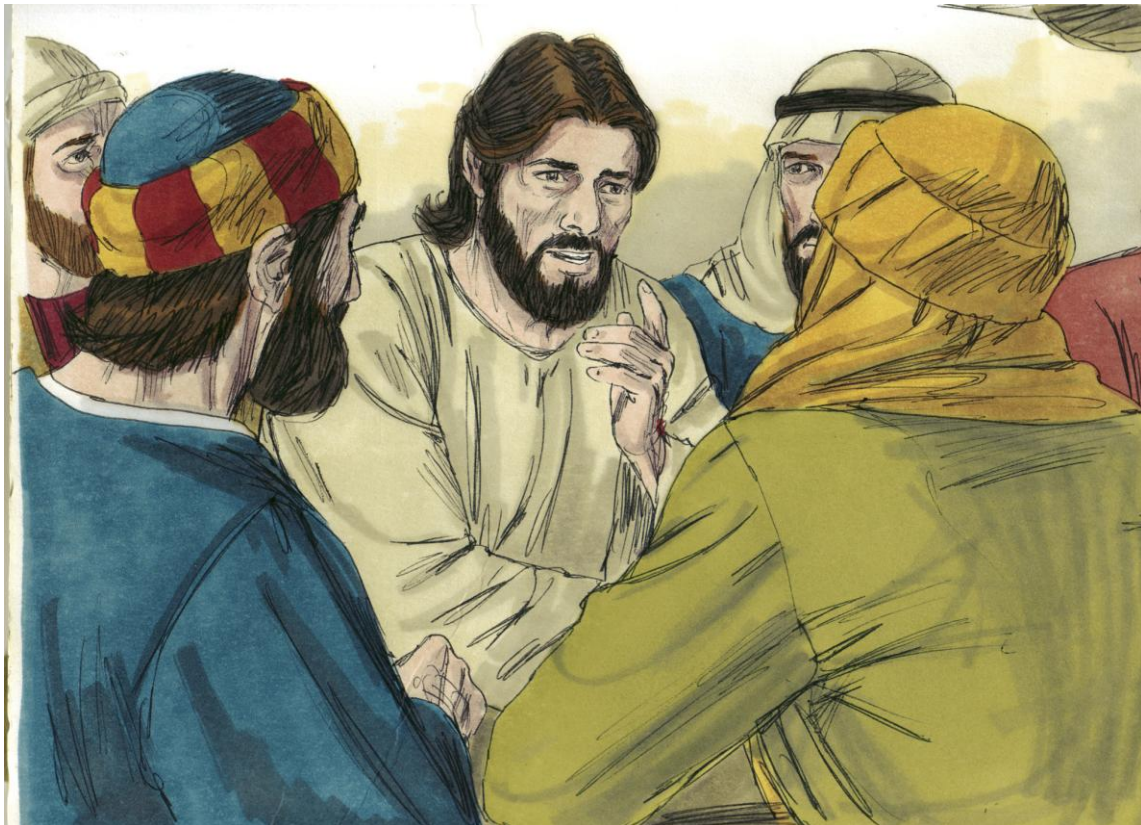
Even later Paul returns to Jerusalem and is told by James, "Thou seest, brother, how many thousands of Jews there are which believe; and they are all zealous of the law" (Acts 21:20). Notice that this speaks of Jews "which believe" and they are all strictly living under the Law of Moses.

The book of Acts clearly teaches us that Israel was still living under the Law during the time of Acts 1-7 (and for some time after this).

A Kingdom on Earth

The Old Testament saints and the disciples in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John were not promised an eternal home in heaven. Instead, they were promised an everlasting kingdom on earth. In the first seven chapters of Acts, are the disciples promised a home in heaven? Or are they still looking for God's kingdom to come to earth?

"When they therefore were come together, they asked of him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?" (Acts 1:6). There is no doubt that the disciples were still looking for a kingdom on earth.



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There are some who teach that the disciples were ignorant or unbelieving when they asked the question in Acts 1:6. These teachers claim that the disciples did not understand the change in God's plans. Supposedly the disciples should have been seeking to go to heaven rather than looking for a kingdom on earth. However, the disciples had their understanding of the Scriptures opened before asking the question in Acts 1:6 (see Luke 24:45).

After His resurrection, Jesus Christ taught the disciples about the kingdom of God for forty days (Acts 1:3). The disciples were not ignorant when they asked, "wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?"--They understood what God would do, but didn't know when He would do it. They knew that God had promised to send a Messiah to sit on the throne of David (Acts 2:30).

Please, also, read Acts 3:19-21. You will see that the disciples were looking for Jesus Christ to come down to earth. They were not expecting to be taken up to heaven. The promise was that Christ would come and restore all things on the earth after Israel repented and was converted.

Therefore, we know that, during the time of Acts 1-7, the disciples were not promised that they would go to heaven. They were promised a place in the kingdom on earth spoken of by the Old Testament prophets.

Israel: The Chosen Nation

In earlier studies, we have learned that God chose Israel to be His nation above all other nations. Israel held this special position in the Old Testament and this continued in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. In Acts 1-7, does Israel still have a special position above all nations? Or have Gentiles been given a position of equality with the Jews?

In considering this question, we remind the reader of Acts 1:6. It speaks of the kingdom being restored to Israel. Clearly the disciples thought Israel still held a special position. Reading the first seven chapters in Acts will confirm that the apostles were correct in their thinking on this matter. Peter and the other apostles were filled with the Holy Ghost (Acts 2:4) and when Peter preached he addressed the Jews who were dwelling in Jerusalem (Acts 2:5). As far as we can learn in the book of Acts, Peter's audience in Acts 2 was all Jewish. If there were any Gentiles present, Peter did not say one word to them.

Peter speaks to "Ye men of Israel" in chapter three (verses 12). He says of them, "Ye are the children of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with our fathers . . ." (verses 25-6). Israel, not any Gentile nation, was addressed as the children of the prophets and the covenant. Again, we see Peter continually addressing Israel, not Gentiles. Peter speaks of Jesus Christ in chapter five when he says, "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" (Acts 5:31). Everything written in Acts 1-7 leads us to conclude that Jews and Gentiles were not equal in the sight of God at that time. Israel still held their favoured position.

[In our next lesson we will continue our study in the book of Acts.]

Review Questions Lesson 21- The Apostles Speak to Israel

True or False

1. The book of Acts comes after Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John in the Bible and tells what happened after the events in those books.
2. All churches today teach that the disciples continued to live under the Law after Christ died and rose again.
3. When we read Acts 15, we find that everyone agreed that all believers were to live under grace, not under the Law.
4. Believers throughout the Bible were promised an eternal home in heaven.

Multiple Choice

5. In Acts 3:19-21 we learn that the disciples were taught that:
 - a) Jesus Christ would return to earth and set up His kingdom in which all things would be restored.
 - b) They would all be taken up to heaven.
 - c) They no longer needed to sacrifice animals.
 - d) Israel was no longer God's chosen nation.
6. Acts 1:6 show that:
 - a) The disciples were ignorant of God's will at that time.
 - b) The Church, the Body of Christ would soon begin.
 - c) The disciples were still looking for God to establish His kingdom in Israel.
 - d) The disciples couldn't understand the Bible.
7. God required Israel to keep the Law:
 - a) In Old Testament times
 - b) Only when they sinned against Him
 - c) When Christ was on earth (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John write about this time)
 - d) During the time written of in Acts 1-7

Fill in the Blanks

8. In Acts 1-7, Israel was still living under the _____ .
9. In Acts 21, James told Paul that all the Jews that believed were _____ of the Law.
10. "Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to _____?"