

ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

NOTES 12

ACTS 3:17-26

FORMER ADVENTIST FELLOWSHIP BIBLE STUDY

In this passage Peter is wrapping up his second gospel sermon after healing the lame beggar in the temple court. He has reminded the Jews that the God of the patriarchs is the one who has glorified Jesus—the one they themselves delivered over to Pilate for death. Now, in the conclusion of his sermon, Peter reminds them that the prophets predicted Jesus and his sufferings, and he calls his audience to repent. He drives his point home by referring to Moses promise that God would raise up a prophet like himself, and Peter shows that Jesus is the One who fulfilled Moses' prophecy, that Jesus came to turn them from wickedness and toward repentance.

Peter argues that all the prophets foretold that the Messiah would suffer, and that Jesus has fulfilled these prophecies throughout the whole Old Testament.

Some people argue that Peter and other New Testament writers were simply reading back into the Old Testament what they wanted it to mean, that their declarations that Jesus fulfilled the prophets' words was just their subjective wish-fulfillment. How can we tell that Peter is accurately stating the facts?

We need to start with Jesus' own interpretation of the Old Testament. Luke records Jesus' famous walk to Emmaus with two unnamed disciples after His resurrection. He fell into step with them as they grieved His death—unaware that He was risen from the dead and that He was the One walking with them. Jesus said to them, "O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?" And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself" (Luke 24:25-27).

When those disciples reached the rest of them, they were recounting their remarkable conversation which they had had on the road. Suddenly Jesus appeared among them and invited them to touch Him and to give Him some fish to eat. The disciples were filled with joy, and after He had eaten, He said to them, "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled." Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, and said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?" And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself" (Luke 24:44-48).

Throughout the gospels, especially Matthew which was written to a Jewish audience, and the book of Acts and the epistles, the Holy Spirit gave the writers the understanding of how Jesus fulfilled the Old Testament prophecies. When one submits his mind to the Lord Jesus and to scripture, believing that it is God's own revealed word to humanity, the connections between the Old Testament and the New Testament are stunning. When we believe that God spoke to us through Scripture, He opens up eternal reality to us through its words, because it is "alive". The author, the Holy Spirit, reveals to us eternal truths through His own words.

For example, Isaiah 53:7-8 are specifically explained in Acts 8:27-33 and are the means of the Ethiopian eunuch coming to faith.

Isaiah 53:7-8 says, "He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth. By oppression and judgment he was taken away; and as for his generation, who considered that he was cut off out of the land of the living, stricken for the transgression of my people?"

The story of the eunuch is recorded in Acts 8:27-33: "And he rose and went. And there was an Ethiopian, a eunuch, a court official of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, who was in charge of all her treasure. He had come to Jerusalem to worship and was returning, seated in his chariot, and he was reading the prophet Isaiah. And the Spirit said to Philip, "Go over and join this chariot." So Philip ran to him and heard him reading Isaiah the prophet and asked, "Do you understand what you are reading?" And he said, "How can I, unless someone guides me?" And he invited Philip to come up and sit with him. Now the passage of the Scripture that he was reading was this: 'Like a sheep he was led to the slaughter and like a lamb before its shearer is silent, so he opens not his mouth. In his humiliation justice was denied him. Who can describe his generation? For his life is taken away from the earth.'"

The Acts passage continues by explaining, in verse 35, "Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning from this Scripture he preached Jesus to him," and the eunuch believed and asked to be baptized as they drove by some water.

Similarly, Acts 4 records Peter and John, having been released from prison by an angel after healing the lame man in the temple, said: "Sovereign Lord, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and everything in them, who through the mouth of our father David, your servant, said by the Holy Spirit, 'Why did the Gentiles rage, and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers were gathered together, against the Lord and against his Anointed,' for truly in this city there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place."

In this passage, the apostles are quoting Psalm 2:1-3 which says, "Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD and against his Anointed, saying, 'Let us burst their bonds apart and cast away their cords from us.'"

Another example of New Testament fulfillments of Old Testament passages is based on Psalm 22:1 which says, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, from the words of my groaning?"

Perhaps the most striking place this Psalm is applied to Jesus was when Jesus said these very words as He hung on the cross just before His death. Matthew 27:46 records this moment: "And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, 'Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?' that is, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?'"

In his first epistle, Peter explained, "Concerning this salvation, the prophets who prophesied about the grace that was to be yours searched and inquired carefully, inquiring what person or time the Spirit of Christ in them was indicating when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glories. It was revealed to them that they were serving not themselves but you, in the things that have now

been announced to you through those who preached the good news to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven, things into which angels long to look" (1 Pet. 1:11).

Peter, the one to whom the Lord Jesus entrusted the "keys of the kingdom, the apostle who oversaw the first Jews, the first Samaritans, and the first gentiles being baptized by the Holy Spirit into the body of Christ as one unified church, explained that the Old Testament prophets wondered when the things God revealed would happen. Moreover, Peter records that God revealed to them that they were not writing for their own times but for people in the future. Peter declares that those future people were the very ones to whom he and his fellow apostles were preaching.

Many of us came from a background where the inspiration and reliability of the Bible was equated with the inspiration and reliability of a false prophet. Of course, we didn't know at first that our "prophet" was false, but most of us grew up with a distinct agnosticism toward the reliability of the New Testament writers' analysis of the Old Testament because we knew how many errors in our prophet's writings we had to ignore or explain away.

When we are willing to release our hold on all we were taught about inspiration and the prophet, the Bible is a completely new book. We begin to see, through the Holy Spirit's own illumination to us, that Scripture is reliable, cohesive, and intricately linked and explained within its own pages. No human minds could have devised such consistent revelation and fulfillments over a span of 1400 years. Scripture was written by the Holy Spirit as obedient men allowed God to tell them what to write.

It is not our job to prove or disprove Scripture; our "job" is to believe. When we place our faith in the Lord Jesus, the Holy Spirit opens Scripture to us just as did Jesus to the unnamed disciples on the road to Emmaus as recorded in Luke 24.

Peter illustrates this fact of God's own revelation of Scripture in verse 18 when he says that God announced beforehand, through the prophets, that Christ would suffer—and concludes that God has fulfilled those prophecies in Jesus.

REPENTANCE, REFRESHING

After explaining how Jesus fulfilled Old testament Scripture, Peter then promises his Jewish audience three things if they will "repent and turn again" to their Lord God. The three things are that their sins will be wiped away, times of refreshing would come from the presence of the Lord, and He would send Jesus, "the Christ appointed to you."

Repentance would lead to refreshing, or being made alive by God's life and power. This refreshing will find its ultimate fulfillment in the kingdom when the Lord Jesus returns from heaven. Paul described this refreshing, this divine justice and redemption of suffering, in 2 Thessalonians 2:5-7: "This is evidence of the righteous judgment of God, that you may be considered worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are also suffering—since indeed God considers it just to repay with affliction those who afflict you, and to grant relief to you who are afflicted as well as to us, when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels."

Repentance will not be immunity from suffering; rather, being a citizen of God's kingdom means that we will suffer. Nevertheless, God's justice prevails. Those who persecute and afflict His people will ultimately be afflicted, and God will grant relief to His people.

Hebrews 4:3-7 describes a more immediate fulfillment of the promise that God will refresh those who repent and return. Hebrews 4 describes it well: "Therefore, while the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us fear lest any of you should seem to have failed to reach it. For good news came to us just as to them, but the message they heard did not benefit them, because they were not united by faith with those who listened. For we who have believed enter that rest, as he has said, 'As I swore in my wrath, "They shall not enter my rest,"' although his works were finished from the foundation of the world. For he has somewhere spoken of the seventh day in this way: 'And

God rested on the seventh day from all his works.' And again in this passage he said, 'They shall not enter my rest.'

"Since therefore it remains for some to enter it, and those who formerly received the good news failed to enter because of disobedience, again he appoints a certain day, 'Today,' saying through David so long afterward, in the words already quoted, 'Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts.'"

This passage is explaining that unbelievers, from Israel on, have failed to enter God's rest. God rested from His work on the seventh day, but those who did not believe did not enter it—even those who had the Sabbath commandment. Yet the passage begins by stating that those who have believe "enter that rest". This passage does not speak of observing the seventh day; rather, the author says that although God rested from His work on the seventh day, He appoints another day on which people can enter rest: "Today". David is the one who first stated another day than Sabbath for entering His rest: "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts."

Then the author drives home the point that the rest people are to enter is not the Promised Land nor the seventh day. He states in verses 8-11: "For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken of another day later on. So then, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God, for whoever has entered God's rest has also rested from his works as God did from his. Let us therefore strive to enter that rest, so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience."

Joshua led Israel into Canaan, and Israel was keeping the Sabbath. Yet they did not enter God's rest. Again the author stresses that if they had entered God's rest, He wouldn't have spoken of "another day" later on. This "other day" is "Today", and this "Today" rest is the Sabbath rest that remains for the people of God. It is the day on which we believe in the Lord Jesus, and we cease from our work to win Christ's favor. We are saved.

The "refreshing" to which Peter refers is entering God's rest where we cease from our own labor to be worthy of Him. It occurs when we are born again of the Spirit, and this refreshing follows repentance and acceptance of His provision for our sin in Christ. Our spirits go from being dead in sin to being alive in Him, and we become vital, alive with the life of God.

RESTORATION

The repentance and refreshing of which Peter spoke would be followed by God's sending "the Christ appointed for you, Jesus, whom heaven must receive until the time for restoring all the things about which God spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets long ago."

Peter is telling the Jews that God will send Jesus back to them. Jesus, He says, was appointed for them—and this passage reassures the Jews that God will not forget His promises to them made to the patriarchs. He will still send Jesus to them.

The return of Jesus, however, will happen at the time God foretold when He would restore all things. Daniel spoke of this time in chapter 12, verses 1-7: "At that time shall arise Michael, the great prince who has charge of your people. And there shall be a time of trouble, such as never has been since there was a nation till that time. But at that time your people shall be delivered, everyone whose name shall be found written in the book. And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. And those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the sky above; and those who turn many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever. But you, Daniel, shut up the words and seal the book, until the time of the end. Many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall increase."

Then I, Daniel, looked, and behold, two others stood, one on this bank of the stream and one on that bank of the stream. And someone said to the man clothed in linen, who was above the waters of the stream, "How long shall it be till the end of these wonders?" And I heard the man clothed in linen, who was above the waters of the stream; he raised his right hand and his left hand toward heaven and swore by him who lives forever that it would be for a time, times, and

half a time, and that when the shattering of the power of the holy people comes to an end all these things would be finished.”

This passage prophesies the coming of a terrible time of trouble. He envisioned the resurrection. Daniel asked when these things would end, and the answer was that the end of these events would come when “the shattering of the holy people comes to an end”. at the end of three-and-a-half “times”, or three and a half years. Although this prophecy lacks detail, it does promise a time will come near the end of the age when the “holy people” (in context this phrase refers to Israel) will no longer be shattered and powerless.

Malachi 4:5-6 also speaks of a time when God will bring life, or refreshing, to Israel. The passage states, “Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes. And he will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the land with a decree of utter destruction.”

Before the end of all things, the day the Lord returns, God will send Elijah to call people to repentance and turn the fathers’ and children’s hearts to each other. To be sure, Jesus identified John the Baptist as Elijah, as He said in Matthew 17:11. Yet Revelation foretells another coming of two witnesses who will come in the spirit of Moses and Elijah. Before the final judgment, God will turn Israel’s hearts back to Him and warm them with His own life, restoring love in them.

Romans 8:19-23 gives us added insight into the eventual time if restoring all things. Paul said this: “For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.”

God Himself subjected creation to the futility of decay; this condition was not Satan’s curse or the “result of sin”. Rather, it was part of God’s curse of the earth which was His judgment on Adam’s sin (Genesis 3). In this passage Paul reveals that this bondage to decay and futility will persist until it is set free from its bondage and obtains “the freedom of the glory of the children of God.” The day is coming when the earth will be set free from decay and made new, as will we when we receive our glorified bodies.

Peter also wrote of this eventual restoration in 2 Peter 3:10-13.

“But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed.

“Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set on fire and dissolved, and the heavenly bodies will melt as they burn! But according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.”

The day is coming, at the end of all things, when God will destroy the heaven and earth as we know it, and He will create something new. Revelation 21:1 records John’s vision of the new heaven and the new earth; the first heaven and earth will have passed away, and the sea will be no more.

Zephaniah 3 describes a time of restoration that does not sound like the new heaven and new earth but rather like a future restoration of the kingdom on earth.

The time of restoration is a time yet coming. Jesus’ first advent was the first fulfillment of the prophecies of restoration, of Elijah turning people’s hearts to each other and to God in the preaching of John the Baptist and in Jesus’ death, resurrection, and ascension resulting in His baptizing His followers with the Holy Spirit. There will still come a time when Jesus will reign over the nations (Revelation 20:1-6), and

in the far future, the new heaven and the new earth will replace the decayed creation we know.

Jesus will return for these future restorations. He will come and reign on earth, and He will be with us eternally in the Father’s kingdom when everything is made new.

A PROPHET LIKE ME

Peter reminds the Jews that Moses, their national hero who delivered their defining law to them, had prophesied that God would raise up a prophet like himself. In Deuteronomy 18:15-19, when he was renewing the covenant with the wilderness generation who would soon be moving into Canaan under Joshua’s leadership, Moses said this:

“The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brothers—it is to him you shall listen—just as you desired of the LORD your God at Horeb on the day of the assembly, when you said, ‘Let me not hear again the voice of the LORD my God or see this great fire any more, lest I die.’ And the LORD said to me, ‘They are right in what they have spoken. I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers. And I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him. And whoever will not listen to my words that he shall speak in my name, I myself will require it of him.’”

This promise of a prophet like Moses grew out of Israel’s fear of the judgment of God on fiery Sinai. The people had been afraid, and they begged Moses not to make them listen to the voice of God coming from the fire any further. God had told Moses they were right; He would speak instead to them by a prophet He would raise up who would be like Moses—one of their own kind. The unbridgeable gap between God and sinful man would be surmounted in a prophet who would be a Jewish brother of their own—yet He would be God. He would speak God’s words to them without the fire and smoke of Sinai.

Moreover, the people would be cut off from Israel, from their position as being part of God’s chosen ones, if they failed to listen to this promised prophet.

Another shadow of this prophet that God would give Israel, besides Moses himself, was the Day of Atonement. God warned Israel that whoever did not “afflict himself” on the yearly Day of Atonement would be “cut off from his people” (Lev. 23:28-29). The Day of Atonement was a shadow of the work of the coming prophet who would be like Moses to them. He would not only speak God’s words to them; He would offer Himself as God’s provided sacrifice to pay the price God demands for sin.

This future prophet who would be both a Jewish man and God, would offer Himself as the infinite sacrifice for human sin. God revealed Himself to Israel as the God who judged sin and demanded righteousness. Israel had to know that God was not a glorified human who could overlook their weakness and desires and give them a “pass” on the basis of an act of penance. God delivered the law to them to let them know that, although they were His chosen people, they were hopelessly broken. He gave them the law to increase their sin. Through Jesus, however, God paid the price He Himself demanded for human sin. First He organized their nation around a document designed to make them aware of sin and to require their continual sacrifice and repentance; then He revealed the ultimate solution in the person of His own Son.

Just before being stoned to death by the Jews, Stephen gave his famous sermon declaring Jesus to be the One God promised Israel. He also reminded them that Moses had told Israel God would raise up a prophet like him, and he reminded them that Israel had turned away from God and from the revelation of God that Moses delivered to them. He reminded them also that God gave them over to the worship of idols, and he explained that the Lord Jesus was the One promised—and they killed Him.

John clarified Moses’ prophecy and its fulfillment this way, “the law was given through Moses; grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ. No man has seen God at any time; the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him” (Jn. 1:17-18). The promised Prophet fulfilled the law delivered by Moses and revealed and explained God and His will to Israel.

When Phillip found Nathanael, he recognized Jesus as the fulfillment of the promised prophet like Moses and said, “We have found him of whom Moses in the Law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph” (Jn. 1:45).

Like Moses, Jesus did not act on His own authority but on the authority of His Father’s words. In John 8:28 he said to the Jews that when He was lifted up, they would know who He was and that He was acting on God’s authority. He further declared in John 12:49-50 that the Father had commanded Him what to say and speak, and those words He spoke were eternal life. Finally, in John 17:6-8, Jesus prayed for His disciples and said they had kept His word. He said that now they knew everything He said and did was from the Father, and He also affirmed that they had received the words from God He had given them. They had believed He came from the Father, and they now knew Him “in truth”.

Jesus was “like Moses” in several ways. He was of their own flesh and blood, a true Israelite. He was God’s appointed spokesperson to the nation; like Moses, He revealed God’s will and delivered God’s word to them. He delivered His people from slavery; Moses led them out of Egypt; Jesus opened the way out of their bondage to death. Like Moses, Jesus endured the nation’s grumbling and dissatisfaction with Him as God’s appointed Deliverer. Like Moses, Jesus was faithful to God in His care of the nation. Moses, however, was a servant in God’s house; Jesus was a Son (Hebrews 3:5-6).

Jesus was the fulfillment of all that Moses delivered; He embodied all of the law. He was the Life where Moses and the law were a shadow. Moses and the law are realized in the Lord Jesus. Moses delivered the Law which showed Israel its intractable sin; Jesus revealed grace and truth and provided the Life that was the answer to the sin Moses made known to the people.

ANNOUNCING THESE DAYS

Peter states that all the prophets from Samuel on had announced the coming of Jesus. This claim is not unique. Jesus Himself first explained how His life was foretold throughout the entire Old Testament. In Luke 24:27 and 44 He said, “And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.

Then he said to them, “These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.”

Jesus was the first One to declare that all the shadows and prophecies of a King and a Redeemer were pointing toward Him. He, God the Son affirmed the validity and inspiration of the Old Testament.

Paul would later confirm the same fact. Paul, the former Pharisee who had studied under Gamaliel and who knew the Old Testament intimately, said confirmed its legitimacy when he went to the synagogue in Athens: “And Paul went in, as was his custom, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and proving that it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead, and saying, ‘This Jesus, whom I proclaim to you, is the Christ’” (Acts 17:2-3).

Later, when he testified before King Agrippa, Paul said, “To this day I have had the help that comes from God, and so I stand here testifying both to small and great, saying nothing but what the prophets and Moses said would come to pass: that the Christ must suffer and that, by being the first to rise from the dead, he would proclaim light both to our people and to the Gentiles” (Acts 26:22-23).

Peter himself, the first evangelist in the newly-formed church, said this during his Pentecost sermon: “God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it. For David says concerning him, ‘I saw the Lord always before me, for he is at my right hand that I may not be shaken; therefore my heart was glad, and my tongue rejoiced; my flesh also will dwell in hope.

For you will not abandon my soul to Hades, or let your Holy One see corruption. You have made known to me the paths of life; you will make me full of gladness with your presence.’

“Brothers, I may say to you with confidence about the patriarch David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. Being therefore a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that he would set one of his descendants on his throne, he foresaw and spoke about the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh see corruption. This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses. Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing. For David did not ascend into the heavens, but he himself says, ‘The Lord said to my Lord, Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool’” (Acts 2:24-35).

In this first post-resurrection sermon, on the occasion when God poured out His Holy Spirit onto Jesus’ followers and subsequently onto 3,000 Jews who came to faith as they listened to Peter, He established that Jesus’ resurrection was foretold by David, the prophet and king who was a type of Christ. It was not only Moses in the law and the prophets but also David in the Psalms who foretold Jesus.

Jesus and the apostles validated the authenticity and reliability of the Old Testament. The Lord Jesus Himself was the embodiment of the hope and promise Israel possessed, and He and Peter, the apostle sent to the Jews, and Paul, the apostle appointed for the gentiles, continually affirmed that Jesus was the One all the Old Testament prophets foretold.

TO YOU FIRST

Peter concludes this second sermon in the book of Acts by saying to the Jews assembled in the temple courts, “God, having raised up his servant, sent him to you first, to bless you by turning every one of you from your wickedness” (v. 26). This statement follows his reminder that they are the inheritors of the promises God made through the prophets and through His covenant “with your fathers”—Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He is acknowledging that God made His covenants with and for the Jews, but Peter is just beginning to realize the far-reaching implications of God’s promises.

Peter reminds them that God raised up and sent His Servant first to them—to the sons of Israel—for their blessing. The fact that He sent Him “first” to Israel, however, means that He also sent Him to someone besides Israel. This reality was not completely revealed to Peter yet; he had just experienced the first Jews becoming born again and followers of Christ Jesus. He was, though, beginning to glimpse the universal power and promise of God’s keeping His covenant and sending Jesus to the world.

Jesus had first demonstrated that His propitiation for sin would redeem gentiles as well as His fellow Jews. In Matthew 15:21-28 He had a famous exchange with a Canaanite woman: “And Jesus went away from there and withdrew to the district of Tyre and Sidon. And behold, a Canaanite woman from that region came out and was crying, ‘Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David; my daughter is severely oppressed by a demon.’ But he did not answer her a word. And his disciples came and begged him, saying, ‘Send her away, for she is crying out after us.’

“He answered, ‘I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.’ But she came and knelt before him, saying, ‘Lord, help me.’ And he answered, ‘It is not right to take the children’s bread and throw it to the dogs.’ She said, ‘Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters’ table.’ Then Jesus answered her, ‘O woman, great is your faith! Be it done for you as you desire.’ And her daughter was healed instantly.”

Jesus affirmed that as the Messiah His first mission was to the Jews, but he also demonstrated that any person, even a Canaanite woman who had faith to believe, would receive His gift of healing and life.

Jesus also revealed these realities to the Samaritan woman at the well in John 4:21-24: “Jesus said to her, ‘Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father.

‘You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.’”

The Samaritans were half-breeds, descendants of the exiled Jews of the northern kingdom and the gentile Assyrians. Despised by Jews, Jesus nevertheless made a deliberate trip into Samaria to have this conversation with a marginalized woman. He established that because of Him, not only the Samaritans syncretistic worship but also the Jews’ mandated worship practices would be eclipsed by the worship of God in spirit and truth. No longer would either group of people have physical holy places and systems of offerings. At the same time, Jesus did acknowledge to this woman that Jews had a spiritual advantage: they knew the true prophecies and requirements of God, but the Samaritans did not.

Nevertheless, both the Jews’ correct systems and the Samaritans’ incorrect ones would soon be obsolete, swallowed up in the reality of the Lord Jesus.

In Jesus all shadows were realized, and as God revealed the administration of the new covenant to His apostles and especially to Paul (Eph. 3:9), the full implications of the gospel and God’s covenant with Abraham became clear.

Acts 13:44-48 records Paul’s declaration that God kept His promise by sending the apostles first to the Jews, but because of their cold reception of Jesus, they turned to the gentiles: “The next Sabbath almost the whole city gathered to hear the word of the Lord. But when the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy and began to contradict what was spoken by Paul, reviling him. And Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly, saying, ‘It was necessary that the word of God be spoken first to you. Since you thrust it aside and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we are turning to the Gentiles. For so the Lord has commanded us, saying, ‘I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.’ And when the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord, and as many as were appointed to eternal life believed.”

Paul states that God had appointed him to carry the gospel to the gentiles, but wherever he went, he first preached to the Jews. In Romans 1:16 he affirmed the same truth: “For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.” He further affirmed that the blessings of the gospel and the sufferings resulting from rejecting it are first for the Jews and then for the gentiles: “There will be tribulation and distress for every human being who does evil, the Jew first and also the Greek, but glory and honor and peace for everyone who does good, the Jew first and also the Greek. For God shows no partiality” (Rom. 2:9-11).

In Romans 4:9-16 Paul explains in detail that the blessing of belief is not only for Jews but also for gentiles: “Is this blessing then only for the circumcised, or also for the uncircumcised? We say that faith was counted to Abraham as righteousness. How then was it counted to him? Was it before or after he had been circumcised? It was not after, but before he was circumcised. He received the sign of circumcision as a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised. The purpose was to make him the father of all who believe without being circumcised, so that righteousness would be counted to them as well, and to make him the father of the circumcised who are not merely circumcised but who also walk in the footsteps of the faith that our father Abraham had before he was circumcised.

“For the promise to Abraham and his offspring that he would be heir of the world did not come through the law but through the righteousness of faith. For if it is the adherents of the law who are to be the heirs, faith is null and the promise is void. For the law brings wrath, but where there is no law there is no transgression.

“That is why it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his offspring—not only to the adherent of the law but also to the one who shares the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all, as it is written, ‘I have made you the father of many nations’—in the presence of the God in whom he believed, who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist.”

As gentiles we often forget that God made His covenants with Israel. It was only the Jews who had the law and the shadows of promise in the system of sacrifices and rituals that foreshadowed the Lord Jesus. God established the nation of Israel to carry the promise of redemption and salvation to the whole world. The Messiah would appear first to them because they were the ones given the promises and the shadows, and Jesus came from their genetic lineage. Israel carried both the blessings and the burdens of the shadows entrusted to them.

God in His faithfulness sent Jesus to Israel to declare that He had kept His promises. Israel, however, failed to receive Him, and the promises extended to the gentiles. Paul, the apostle whom God appointed not only to give the gospel to the gentiles but also to explain to everyone the mystery of salvation coming to the gentiles wrote this in Ephesians 3:7-12: “Of this gospel I was made a minister according to the gift of God’s grace, which was given me by the working of his power. To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things, so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. This was according to the eternal purpose that he has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord, in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through our faith in him.”

God sent Jesus to the lost sheep of Israel to announce they had a Shepherd, that the One whom they expected had come. Because He didn’t fit their collective expectations for their deliverer, the nation as a whole did not receive Him. Peter was just beginning to understand the universal reality of God’s plan for His church. That day in Jerusalem as he preached to the Jews who witnessed him and John healing the man lame from birth, Peter took them through a brief explanation of their own Scriptures and national expectations and showed how Jesus fulfilled all those promises.

His death, burial, and resurrection had been a surprise to them—but Peter explained that He had come to them first. He had ministered in Judea and Jerusalem, and He declared that God had finally sent them the rescue they anticipated. Peter pointed out that Jesus came to the Jews first because it was to the Jews that God had promised a deliverer, a prophet like Moses, one who would lift their burden of oppression.

The mystery that became known after Pentecost and was clarified in Paul’s ministry is that all people are ushered into this promise of God. If any person, Jew or gentile, puts his faith in the Lord Jesus and accepts His shed blood as payment for his or her sin, that person is saved.

MEDITATION

God is asking you to take Him at His word. Believe that He sent Jesus for you, and repent before Him. As you submit to Him, you can find forgiveness, redemption and restoration, and you will at last have the power to surrender your struggles to Him because His promises are faithful. When you allow the Lord Jesus to be your Sacrifice and your Lord, you enter eternal life and become part of the mystery of ages past: Christ lives in you, a gentile by birth, and you have become part of His body through whom the manifest wisdom of God is declared to rulers and authorities in the spiritual realm as well as in this world.

When you place your trust in Christ, you receive a role to play in God’s eternal story, and you are adopted as His child forever. †

ACTS

OF THE APOSTLES

12

ACTS 3:17-26

FORMER ADVENTIST FELLOWSHIP BIBLE STUDY

STUDY

Peter wraps up his second gospel sermon after healing the lame beggar in the temple court. He has reminded the Jews that the God of the patriarchs glorified Jesus, the one they themselves delivered over to Pilate and to death. In this conclusion he reminds them that the sufferings of Jesus were predicted by the prophets and fulfilled by Jesus, and he calls his audience to repent. He quotes Moses saying God would raise up a prophet like him, and God raised up Jesus specifically to lead them to repentance and to turning away from their wickedness.

1. Peter acknowledges the people had acted toward Jesus in ignorance, not fully realizing He was the promised Messiah. Nevertheless, he states, God foretold Christ's sufferings, and Jesus fulfilled the prophecies. How do we know Peter is accurately stating the facts and not simply reading his understanding back into the Old Testament Scriptures?

Luke 24:25-27 _____

Luke 24:44-48 _____

Is 53:7-8 compared with Acts 8:27-33 _____

Ps 2:1-3 compared with Acts 4:24-28 _____

Ps. 22:1 compared with Matthew 27:46 and 1 Peter 1:11 _____

2. What three things does Peter say will come as a result of repenting and returning in verses 19-20?

3. What is the “refreshing” of which Peter speaks in v. 19?

2 Thessalonians 1:7 _____

Hebrews 4:1-2 _____

Hebrews 4:3-7 _____

Hebrews 4:8-11 _____

4. What is the “time for restoring all things” in verse 21, and where else is this discussed?

Daniel 12:1-7 _____

Mal. 4:5-6 _____

Matthew 17:11 _____

Romans 8:19-23 _____

2 Peter 3:10-13 _____

Rev. 21:1 _____

5. Moses said God would raise up a prophet like him from Israel’s brethren. Who is this prophet, and how is he like Moses?

Deuteronomy 18:15-19 _____

Leviticus 23:28-29 _____

John 1:45 _____

John 8:28 _____

John 12:49-50 _____

John 17:6-8 _____

Acts 7:35-42 _____

John 1:16-17 _____

6. Where else besides verse 24 do we find evidence that all the OT prophets were announcing the coming of Jesus?

Luke 24:27, 44 _____

Acts 17:2,3 _____

Acts 26:22-23 _____

Acts 2:24-35 _____

7. Peter reminds his Jewish audience that they are the sons of the prophets and of the covenant God made with their fathers—that He would bless “all the families of the earth” through Abraham’s seed. Peter also tells them that it was for them first that God raised up Jesus “to bless you by turning every one of you from your wicked ways.” What were the implications of God’s covenant with Abraham that the Jews did not comprehend and that Peter, the apostle to who Jesus had given the “keys to the kingdom”, was only beginning to understand, and why did he say, “to you first”?

Romans 15:8-9 _____

Matt. 15:21-28 _____

John 4:21-24 _____

Acts 13:44-48 _____

Romans 1:16 _____

Romans 2:9-11 _____

Ephesians 3:9-12 _____

Romans 4:9-16 _____

MEDITATION

How has God blessed you through Abraham's Seed? How has knowing Jesus changed your understanding of the Bible? In what ways have you had to "repent and return", and from what is God asking you to repent now? Ask Jesus to be more real to you than your fear, and ask Him to show you what is real and true and to give you the courage to walk in truth instead of in confusion and self-protective reacting. He has conquered death and set you free from the fear of death; praise Him!

ACTS 3:17-26

Verse	Peter	God	Jews	Other

ACTS 3:17–26

And now, brothers, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did also your rulers. But what God foretold by the mouth of all the prophets, that his Christ would suffer, he thus fulfilled. Repent therefore, and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out, that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that he may send the Christ appointed for you, Jesus, whom heaven must receive until the time for restoring all the things about which God spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets long ago. Moses said, ‘The Lord God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your brothers. You shall listen to him in whatever he tells you. And it shall be that every soul who does not listen to that prophet shall be destroyed from the people.’ And all the prophets who have spoken, from Samuel and those who came after him, also proclaimed these days. You are the sons of the prophets and of the covenant that God made with your fathers, saying to Abraham, ‘And in your offspring shall all the families of the earth be blessed.’ God, having raised up his servant, sent him to you first, to bless you by turning every one of you from your wickedness.” (Acts 3:17-26 ESV)