

The Hope of Israel in Acts

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Introduction

The purpose of this paper is twofold. The first is to provide a standalone paper on the book of Acts which demonstrates how it views God's relationship to both Jews and Gentiles in the light of the promises which He made to Abraham in Genesis 12:1-3. The body of this paper after the Introduction was originally an Addendum to a paper on Joel entitled The Prophecy of Joel: With The Help of Jeremiah 23 and the Book of Acts., and I have not changed any wording in it here. Therefore, the reader will sometimes encounter references to the latter paper, and reading it would provide a more complete explanation for the conclusions which I am drawing in this standalone paper.

The conclusion to which I came in the paper on Joel, which will serve as important information for this paper, has four parts, that God through Joel is describing —

1. His judgment of the Jews on the land of Israel just prior to the return of Jesus the Messiah.
2. His raising up an army of Gentiles as the instrument of His judgment of the Jews. This army will invade the land of Israel, destroy its food supply, and kill many Jews.
3. His judging the Gentile army for its evil act of seeking to harm His possessions, the Jews and their (His) land.
4. His revival and restoring the Jews to authentic spiritual believers in Him, such that they will be the "great nation" and Kingdom of God which He promised in Genesis 12:2, living on His gift to them of the land of Israel with abundant food and in complete security.

The second purpose of this paper on the book of Acts is to respond to a trend within Christianity which considers the Old Testament rather passé and irrelevant. The claim is that Jesus and the New Testament gospels have demonstrated that the authors of the Old Testament were not entirely accurate in the ideas that they presented. For example, Moses meant well when he said the temple was a "permanent" structure, but Jesus clarifies what Moses meant by showing that it is not. Instead, Jesus is the permanent temple of the people of God, thus rendering the old temple irrelevant for even the Jews.

As a result, while deriving the original author's intent in the Old Testament is a noble task, it does not lead the Bible student to the truth. Only the New Testament, and specifically the gospel accounts of the life, words, death, and resurrection of Jesus, is the truth of God, which must be used to correct the misconceptions of the Old Testament authors. This perspective also makes studying the Old Testament an interesting task, but we see that the student can soon become less than enthusiastic in pursuing this task, because the only appealing portion of the Bible is the New Testament. If the New Testament exists partly to point out the errors in the Old Testament, then what use really is the Old Testament? Does it not make more sense to study only the truth—the New Testament?

In addition, this trend in Christianity claims that the Old Testament is a fine collection of documents for Jews as an ancient nation and the people of God in Old Testament times. But Jesus and the New Testament demonstrate that the Jewish nation has been replaced by a

new people of God, who are comprised of both Jews and Gentiles who embrace Jesus as their Messiah and who will live together in the eternal Kingdom of God which has begun to come into existence in a substantial and concrete way by means of the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus.

Consequently, this trend is ultimately claiming that the Old Testament is neither correct nor inerrant, to use a more historical term for this issue. I think that this trend is wrong and results in destroying the validity and God's intended usefulness of the Old Testament. While advocates of this trend claim that it is essential to get at the original author's intent in each document of the Old Testament, the problem with their perspective is the supposition that the author's intent may not be the truth, as for example regarding the longevity of the temple. Just as I would not want to take a class on mathematics in school that uses a textbook which presents erroneous ideas, so also I have no interest in taking a class on the nature of reality in God's school of life which presents erroneous ideas. Therefore, this trend of reducing God's textbook on His plans and purposes to only the New Testament renders, in my opinion, any study of the Old Testament unappealing.

In this paper, I am assuming that God was correct in what He intended to communicate through Joel and other Old Testament books—either by having their human authors quote God directly, or by having their authors write about events and concepts that are the free-will presentation of ideas which the human authors are desirous of communicating. I assume the same of the New Testament. In fact, the entire Bible is correct in everything it means to say on the topics which it addresses. Therefore, if Jesus appears to be saying something different from Moses, we either misunderstand Jesus or Moses or both. This also implies that deriving an accurate understanding of the original authors' intents after 3,500-2,000 years is a difficult and lengthy task. In addition, the inerrancy of the biblical authors also implies that no one but the biblical authors will be able to derive a 100% accurate understanding of themselves. In other words, only the Bible is inerrant. None of its students, who is not a biblical author, is. Therefore, when advocates of this trend claim that their study of Jesus and the gospels has led them to conclude that Moses is wrong, they are asserting that they have a higher level and more accurate knowledge of the Old Testament than Jesus did, who, I would claim, considered the Old Testament to be completely true.¹

Finally, the process of studying Moses and Jesus is the same. In fact, it is the same as coming to a correct conclusion about what any author, including God through Joel, intends to communicate—*if the author desires to communicate his ideas such that the reader will be able to understand exactly what he means*. This process uses the three instruments or tools of language, history, and common sense, which are the only legitimate tools for interpreting not only Joel, but also any written document whereby the author desires to communicate his ideas to readers so that they can be understood. I am implying that the converse of this is also

¹ Arguing for this fact would take more time and space than I desire to devote in this paper, but, briefly, Jesus' declarations to the Jews in Acts 10 that Psalm 82 and the rest of the writings of the Old Testament "cannot be broken," i.e., cannot be ignored *because they are all inerrant and infallible*, are the foundational ideas for concluding that the entire Bible is inerrant. If God has not provided an inerrant and infallible Bible, then we are left to our own subjective judgments to decide what is true and what is false in it. This is contrary to Jesus' perspective on the Bible and, ultimately, leads to futility and despair because of the minimal confidence with which we can hold our conclusions about what is true vs. what is false in the Bible. The only way that we can have a healthy and sane level of confidence as to what is truth is for God to have given us an inerrant and infallible set of documents, which we call the Bible. Therefore, that we start with it as a sure anchor and source of ideas which we can count on as being true.

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true. When an author desires to communicate his ideas in such a way that he can be understood, then he uses language, history, and common sense to do so. After accurate communication has taken place, after both the author and the reader have used these tools to convey one specific meaning and to construe this meaning, respectively, the all important question is, Are the author's ideas true or false? The Bible is the only set of documents in which each idea that an author communicates is true.

In this paper, I may not always explicitly state when I am using language vs. history vs. common sense in my seeking to understand what God and the book of Acts (along with the other biblical authors which we will need to examine) are saying, but I hope that it will nevertheless be clear when I am doing so. Indeed, the better way to refer to this process is that the reader is always using all three tools at the same time—his familiarity with the author's language, his familiarity with the author's personal history and historical context (that may extend for many years before him and many years after him), and his familiarity with how common sense, the rational and logical perception of things which is triggering ideas in his mind, works in engaging with and participating in reality around him, the reader, and which includes him.

Acts 2 and the Hope of Israel

For our understanding Joel, it will also be helpful to examine the apostle Peter's speech on the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2:14-40. Peter quotes Joel 2:28-32 and says, "...this is that which was spoken through the prophet Joel." It certainly sounds as though Peter's claim is that Joel 2:28-32 is being fulfilled in its entirety right then and there on the Day of Pentecost, which contradicts my conclusion in this paper that these verses will not be fulfilled until Jesus returns future to us. But, is it possible that Peter is saying that "this" on the Day of Pentecost is *like* what Joel is predicting in regard to the return of Jesus? Or, that "this" on the Day of Pentecost is *the beginning* of what Joel predicts will happen in its fullness much later? Or, that "this" on the Day of Pentecost is something other than these two possibilities? I think that he is saying that the events of Pentecost are in line with Joel's prediction, but that they are not the complete fulfillment, which will occur at Jesus' return. In other words, the reality of God's changing the hearts of all the Jews on the land of Israel when Jesus returns is at play on the Day of Pentecost when God causes the apostles and other disciples of Jesus to speak about Him with languages that are unknown to them. In order for me to demonstrate how I draw this conclusion, it will be necessary to examine many passages in the book of Acts as the appropriate context of Peter's speech.

The Feast of Pentecost in Acts 2 takes place only fifty days or so after Jesus' death and resurrection during the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread. But our journey to understanding Peter's speech in Acts 2 will pass through twelve different passages in the book of Acts, starting at the end of the book and moving towards the beginning. In each of these passages, someone, e.g., Peter, Paul, or James, says something about how the apostles or Jews in Jesus' day understood the relationship between the Old Testament promises of God and the Jews in the 1st century A.D., as well as the relationship between the Old Testament predictions of the Messiah and the Jews in the 1st century A.D. These two Old Testament subjects, God's promises and the messianic predictions, are the key to understanding His relationship to the Jews in any time period, including both that in the 1st century A.D. and that during Jesus' future return.

All this boils down to Joel's (with the other Old Testament prophets') and Acts' saying that God will fulfill His promises to the Jews when Jesus returns by using Jesus as the Messiah as His primary tool or instrument to do so. In other words, God's promise of Genesis 12:2 to mold the Jews into the greatest nation on earth in human history will be fulfilled when Jesus returns. God changes the Jews' hearts so that they become authentic believers in their Messiah, and Jesus establishes his messianic, millennial kingdom on the land of Israel with its capital in Jerusalem. In addition, this involves the Jews' finally obeying the Mosaic Covenant in the manner in which He always wanted—with circumcised hearts (cf. Deuteronomy 10:16;29,30). It also makes sense to view all the prophets and even Acts as indicating that the Jews' millennial obedience to the Mosaic Covenant will include offering its prescribed sacrifices in a rebuilt temple in the midst of submitting to and worshipping Jesus as their God and King—and as the ultimate temple of God. The inference obviously is that the animal sacrifices are merely symbolic of Jesus' sacrifice and its unique effect of providing the Jews (and Gentiles also) with God's eternal mercy. But this has been the significance of the Mosaic Covenant's offerings from their inception. God never provided a Old Testament

Jewish believer with mercy on the basis of his animal sacrifice in the temple. He did so only on the basis of Jesus' sacrifice, and the biblical authors—from Moses to Malachi—understood and wrote about this. However, many, if not most of the Jews throughout history, have misunderstood the concepts which the Old Testament authors communicated regarding this central idea in the Bible. Therefore, as we will see in Acts, Jesus never clarifies the Old Testament by correcting it *per se*. He (and his apostles in the New Testament) clarifies it by correcting his contemporary Jews' interpretation of it. For example, the message of the book of Hebrews is that mercy from God to any Jew comes through Jesus' sacrifice, even while Jews offer their stipulated animal sacrifices—regardless of the time period in history. Jesus' sacrifice does not replace the Jews' animal sacrifices. They and he demonstrate that God always intended to communicate through all the biblical authors that divine mercy and forgiveness always comes through him—only.

There is also at least one passages in Acts where a speaker comments on the relationship between the Old Testament promises of God and the Gentiles of the 1st century A.D. Consequently, by studying all the relevant passages in Acts, including Peter's quote of Joel 2:28-32 in his speech on Pentecost, we can add our understanding of them to the conclusions we have drawn from the whole book of Joel, parts of Revelation, etc. In order to save time and space, I will assume that my interpretations of Joel and other Old Testament and New Testament passages as stated in the body of this paper are correct. Therefore, I encourage the reader to keep in mind what we have already learned from the Bible while we explore the book of Acts.

Acts 28:16-30

We begin at the end with Acts 28:16-30,

Acts 28:16 When he entered Rome, Paul was permitted to stay by himself with a soldier guarding him. **28:17** And after three days, he called together those who were leaders of the Jews. And when they gathered together, he said to them,

Men, brothers, even though I had done nothing wrong to the people or with respect to the traditions of the fathers, I was handed over as a prisoner from Jerusalem into the hands of the Romans. **28:18** When they had examined me, they were willing to release me, because there was no cause in me to put me to death. **28:19** But when the Jews objected, I was compelled to appeal to Caesar, not that my nation had anything with which to accuse me. **28:20** For this reason, I have requested to see you and speak to you—because I am wearing this chain for the sake of the hope of Israel.

28:21 They said to him,

We have received no letters concerning you from Judea. Nor have any of the brothers come here and reported or spoken anything bad about you. **28:22** And we would count it an honor to hear from you what you think, because it has become known to us concerning this sect that it is spoken against everywhere.

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28:23 When they had set a day for him, they came to him at his lodging in large numbers. He explained to them by carefully bearing witness to the Kingdom of God, persuading them about Jesus from the instruction of Moses and the prophets, from morning to evening. **28:24** Some were persuaded by the things being said, but some did not believe. **28:25** And after they did not agree with one another, they left after Paul made one more statement,

The Spirit who is different correctly spoke through Isaiah the prophet to your fathers,

28:26 Go to this people and say, You will keep on hearing, but you will not understand. You will keep on seeing, but you will not see. **28:27** For the heart of this people has become dull, with their ears they barely hear, and they have closed their eyes. Otherwise, they see with their eyes, they hear with their ears, they understand with their heart, and they turn, so that I heal them <Isaiah 6:9,10>.

28:28 Therefore, let it be known to you that this salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles. They will indeed listen.

28:30 And he stayed for a full two years in his own rented quarters, and he received all those who came to him, **28:31** proclaiming the Kingdom of God and teaching with all boldness and unhindered the things about the Lord Jesus the Messiah.

For time's and space's sake, just as I will not repeat everything we learned from Joel, Revelation, and the other parts of the Bible, I also will not examine every detail of these passages in Acts. But I will consider the salient points, especially for our goal of understanding Peter's use of Joel 2:28-32 in Acts 2. The first question we can ask of these very last verses of Acts is, Why did Luke choose to end his story of the actions, travels, speeches, and effects of the apostles after Jesus' ascension with this event in Rome that took place around A.D. 62? If Jesus died, rose from the dead, and ascended into heaven sometime between A.D. 30 and 33, and Luke's story of the apostles ranges from Jerusalem to Rome, with many places in Turkey and Greece in between, why did Luke decide that A.D. 62 and Rome were the best time and location to end his story? In addition, Paul must have interacted with many Gentiles in Rome in addition to Jews during his two year imprisonment there around A.D. 62. Why would Luke end Acts with a conversation between Paul and the Jews which does not actually go so well, when it comes to his trying to convince the Jews in Rome that Jesus is the Messiah?

We know also from Acts 9 that God had specifically given to Paul alone the responsibility of being the apostle *to the Gentiles*. This being the case, why does Luke end the book of Acts with a conversation between him *and Jews*? Is it to demonstrate that 1) God is now more interested in drawing Gentiles than Jews into the community of believers (because of how poorly the conversation goes and what Paul says at the end), 2) God still considers the Jews to be "first in line" so to speak for the good news of Jesus as the Jewish Messiah, in spite of their resistance to this message, or 3) God is still mostly interested in Jews' becoming believers, while He also is very interested in Gentiles' becoming believers, especially through Paul, the unique apostle to the Gentiles? I think that the answer is #3, but we will need the rest of Acts, along with our previous conclusions about Joel, Revelation, etc. to arrive here.

In addition, our analysis of Acts 28:16-31 will properly set the stage for our understanding the rest of the passages in Acts which we will examine.

We should also note that, if Paul had been arrested and sent to Rome between A.D. 49 and 54, this conversation could not have taken place, because Emperor Claudius expelled all the Jews from Rome in A.D. 49 on account of violent arguments which were taking place among them about whether or not Jesus is the Messiah. These arguments spilled into the streets of the capital city and disrupted life to the extent that Claudius felt it necessary to ban all Jews from Rome before they tore his city apart. In A.D. 54, Claudius died, which, according to Roman law, provided the Jews with the opportunity to return to Rome. In fact, this is exactly what some of the Christians mentioned in chapter 16 of Paul's letter to the Roman *Gentile* Christians are doing. Thus, eight years later, in A.D. 62, there is certainly an enclave of Jews living in Rome who have heard about Jesus as the Messiah but have not had a proper and complete explanation of him to be able to believe. Paul provides them with this kind of explanation in Acts 28:16-31.

Paul first tells his Jewish visitors that he "had done nothing wrong to the people or with respect to the traditions of the fathers." The "people" are the Jews in Jerusalem, and, by extrapolation, Jews everywhere, because they are all members of the divinely important ethnic group to whom God made His promises through Abraham and to whom He gave instructions, the Mosaic Covenant, for how they were to live life as His people. The "traditions of the fathers" is potentially ambiguous. When it comes to talking about the Old Testament, Bible students in our day sometimes refer to *how the Jews understood it*. Other times, they refer to *what the Old Testament authors meant*. Because of our interest in the truth of the Bible, we are concerned about discovering in its documents what the authors meant, while we also may find it helpful to know how the Jews understood it. However, it is only the author's intent which is inerrant truth, because the Jews obviously misunderstood the Old Testament, which resulted in their crucifying their own Messiah.

To which is Paul referring here in Acts 28:17? Is he saying that he "had done nothing wrong with respect to" the current Jewish understanding of the Old Testament, which is clearly incorrect, because they not only misperceived Jesus' identity as the Messiah, but also rejected the apostles' explanation of Jesus. Or is he saying that he "had done nothing wrong with respect to" the original authors' inerrant intent in the Old Testament? Like Jesus, Paul has no interest in following erroneous ideas. He is all about the truth. Therefore, it makes sense that Paul is saying that, in the story of Acts 21 when he was arrested, he had done nothing wrong with respect to what God intended in His instructions in the Old Testament and the Mosaic Covenant specifically. Consequently, there were two possibilities for what the Jews in Jerusalem were doing. Either they were misunderstanding the Old Testament themselves and, thereby, falsely accusing Paul. Or they made up a false charge against him when it was clear, even to them, that he was not violating the Mosaic Covenant. From the story, we will see that it is the latter—that the Jews falsely charged Paul with violating the Mosaic Coveant. However, Paul would not deny that the Jews mostly held a very incorrect perspective on the Old Testament, as signified by their rejection of not only Jesus as the Messiah, but also Paul as an apostle of the Messiah.

Then, in the midst of describing to the Jewish guests "in his own rented quarters" that he got to Rome by being arrested in Jerusalem on false charges, Paul tells them that his

imprisonment, which will lead to an audience with Caesar Nero, is “for the sake of the hope of Israel,” a phrase that is certainly important for our understanding even Peter’s perspective on Joel and its relationship to Pentecost in Acts 2 (cf. Acts 28:30,20 respectively), because we assume that the apostle Peter’s understanding of the Old Testament is the same as the apostle Paul’s. What does Paul mean by the “hope of Israel?” First, the name Israel originally applied to Jacob, whose name God changed to Israel, and to the physical descendants of Abraham through Isaac and Jacob, i.e., the twelve tribes of Israel (cf. Genesis 32:28; Exodus 3:16; 4:22). These are the Jews. And Paul is speaking in the midst of Jews, so that it does not make sense to change the meaning of Israel to some other group—for example, Jews and Gentiles who believe in Jesus as their Messiah. For one thing, these Jews are not yet believers. Some of them become such a little while later in the midst of Paul’s explaining Jesus as their Messiah (cf. v 24).

Second, for what could they be hoping? While the tendency within the modern, Gentile church is to say, eternal life, if we put together the clues from our study of Joel, Revelation, and consider the inerrancy of the Bible along with God’s character of being faithful to all His promises, the better answer is the fulfillment of the promises which God made to Abraham in Genesis 12:1-3, as mentioned already in this paper –

1. the land of Canaan/Israel as a gift to Abraham’s physical descendants
2. physical descendants (the Jews)
3. eventually turning these physical descendants into a “great nation”
4. eternal life
5. using Abraham and his physical descendants as a means for Gentiles to obtain eternal life

Another answer to what “Israel” could be hoping for is to change the meaning of Israel so that it refers to the collection of human beings who believe in Jesus of Nazareth as their king and priest for the sake of obtaining only God’s gift of eternal mercy and life. This collection, therefore, includes both Jews and Gentiles. But this answer also implies that God’s promises to Abraham of a physical land and turning his physical descendants into a great nation either have reached their fulfillment at some time in the past, or have been dropped by God—probably because the Jews have demonstrated such consistent and persistent disobedience to Him down through history that He has decided to forego these promises and concentrate solely on granting eternal life to both Jews and Gentiles with authentic belief in Jesus as their king and priest.

Which option makes more sense in this context where Paul is speaking to only Jews? Is he referring to God’s still being intent on fulfilling all His Abrahamic promises to the Jews, or is he referring to God’s fulfilling only the one Abrahamic promise of eternal life to both Jews and Gentiles? Paul is speaking to Jews who have not yet learned to connect Jesus with God’s promises. Therefore, these Jews are most likely still looking forward to His granting their nation both the land and greatness among all the nations on earth. Luke does not say that Paul refutes these expectations of his Jewish guests. Indeed, we will see that every time Paul talks about the Jews in Acts, he very much joins with them in their identity, purpose, and expectations as the chosen people of God on earth. He has no intent to change anything

about the Jews except their rejection of Jesus as their Messiah (and their understanding of God's grace, which must be included in their belief in Jesus).

In addition, it certainly does not make sense to interpret God as a promise-breaker. That He would assure Abraham in Genesis 12:1-3, guarantee Abraham that He will follow through on His assurances and promise in Genesis 15, and swear an oath in Genesis 21 that He will keep His promises which He has guaranteed, and then not transform the physical descendants of Abraham into the greatest nation in history is nonsense. It turns God into a liar and makes Him as evil, if not more so because He is a transcendent liar, than human beings.

We can also ask if Paul uses the word "hope" to refer to expectations that the Jews have that are less than absolutely certain? We say sometimes that we hope that something in our lives changes, but we may not be able to think that it is beyond doubt that it will. In fact, most of the time we use the word "hope," we do not mean that we are guaranteed that what we hope will indeed occur. However, Paul says in Romans 5:2 that "we boast in waiting expectantly [the same word as 'hope' in Acts 28:20] for the glory of God," meaning that we Christians hope for the time when God will transform us into morally perfect beings in eternity. And Paul also makes it clear in Romans that God has promised and guaranteed that those whom He has changed inwardly, so that they exhibit genuine belief in Jesus as the Messiah, will obtain moral perfection and eternal life. This is predicated, of course, on God's not being a liar, on His speaking the truth when He promises something to someone. If Paul uses "hope" to refer to God's following through on His promise to grant eternal life to Christians, does it make sense that he would say to the Jews in Rome that God's promise to transform them into a great nation is a lie, while using the same word "hope"? Absolutely not, unless we are prepared to impugn God's character and call Him a liar. But then what hope does any of us have in gaining eternal life? None, because a God who promises one thing and lies about it cannot promise another thing and be thought of definitely keeping the promise. Either God keeps all His promises of Genesis 12:1-3, or He is in jeopardy of keeping none of them—so that Paul also is a liar. But the best way to interpret Paul in both Acts and Romans is to mean that God always speaks the truth, and if His statements include promises that He is making, then He will definitely and with 100% certainty keep the promises.

Thus, Luke as the author of Acts is showing in chapter 28 that Paul is granting these expectations of God's fulfilling all His promises to the Jews and explaining how they will be met only by means of Jesus of Nazareth as their Messiah. Consequently, by the phrase "the hope of Israel," Paul means all the promises which God made to Abraham and his physical descendants, the Jews, and which include land, descendants, their becoming a great nation, eternal life, and their being God's instrument to bring eternal life to the Gentiles (with the main Jewish instrument obviously being Jesus of Nazareth).

We also notice that Paul's Jewish visitors have heard that there is a lot of opposition to Christianity in the Roman world (v. 22). Are they referring to Jewish opposition only, or to Gentile opposition only, or to both? Probably the last option, to both, because there certainly has been a plethora of both (cf. Acts 16-21 and the disturbances in Ephesus, Philippi, Thessalonica, Corinth, Jerusalem; and there is also Rome, from which the Jews were banned for fighting over the truth of Jesus). Certainly over the years, between A.D. 33 and 62, many people have had the opportunity to hear about various responses and reactions

to the presentation by Paul and others of the New Testament message to those living throughout Asia (Turkey), Greece, and even Jerusalem/Judea. Now these Roman Jews, who had probably either originally lived in Rome during the Jewish riots over Jesus, or lived in one of these other areas of the Roman Empire, or lived in both will hear the message straight from the apostle of the Gentiles, Paul.

Luke goes on to call this the message of the “Kingdom of God,” and Paul’s basis for explaining it is “the instruction of Moses and the prophets” (ἀπό τε τοῦ νόμου Μωϋσέως καὶ τῶν προφητῶν) (v. 23). “Moses’ instructions and the prophets” refer to the Old Testament. Thus, we see that Paul does not use the New Testament and the written message of Jesus (it does not yet exist) in order to explain the Kingdom of God. He uses the Old Testament to do so. This logically implies that the Old Testament is sufficient to explain God’s plans and purposes with respect to the Messiah and the Kingdom of God in order to have an accurate (but not complete) understanding of them. The only things which the Old Testament is missing are the actual details of Jesus’ life, death, resurrection, and ascension. These are the details which we find in the four gospel accounts and the beginning of the book of Acts. Luke is telling us that Paul does not use Jesus to explain the Old Testament. He uses the Old Testament to explain Jesus, which implies that the Old Testament is accurate, inerrant, and adequate to learn all the salient ideas a Jew (or Gentile) needs in order to decide to embrace Jesus as the Messiah.

As I mentioned in the Introduction, there is a trend within modern Christianity which considers the Old Testament to be not only lacking specific details of Jesus’ life, but also incorrect in its meaning when it was first written. For example, the passages which explain the temple of the Mosaic Covenant, where the Jews present their offerings of animal sacrifices, grain, etc. to God, supposedly state that it is a permanent and adequate place for obtaining God’s mercy. However, this modern trend claims that Jesus comes along and clarifies Moses’ original meaning in Exodus-Deuteronomy to indicate that Moses was wrong to say that the temple is permanent, because Jesus replaces the Mosaic Covenant temple. Therefore, when the Old Testament prophets refer to the rebuilding of the temple, they are also wrong, because Jesus clarifies that he is the temple. In effect, this trend within Christianity is claiming that we need to use the New Testament, i.e., Jesus, to explain the Old Testament. However, Luke is telling the reader of Acts 28:23 that Paul, in his conversation with these Jews in Rome, is using the Old Testament to explain Jesus. By extrapolation, when the New Testament authors quote the Old Testament, it is not to say that the latter is wrong and they are now showing their readers how to change its meaning and understand it better. Instead, they are showing their readers how the Old Testament provides an accurate and inerrant foundation for understanding their documents which end up comprising the New Testament.

Therefore, it does not make sense to say that the Old Testament means something which needs clarifying, i.e., correcting, by the New Testament. The Old Testament does not provide the reader with a partial and, therefore, erroneous picture of the Kingdom of God. It provides a partial and yet adequate and inerrant picture of the Kingdom of God. All the Old Testament lacks are the details of Jesus’ life, death, resurrection, and ascension as presented by the four gospels and Acts. This also implies that the New Testament does not change any of the ideas which the Old Testament authors presented in their writings. It clarifies what

they wrote only in the sense that it is adding more details, not changing the meaning. Thus, if the New Testament is clarifying the Old, it in no way is saying that the latter is inadequate or wrong in the ideas which it presents. Indeed, it is saying that the Old Testament authors were completely correct in that which they intended to communicate to their readers. Consequently, we have here at the end of the book of Acts verification that Jesus does not radicalize the message of the Old Testament by revealing that it is somehow wrong or inadequate in what it communicates. Instead, the Old Testament is very adequate for the apostle Paul to communicate Jesus to his Jewish listeners and persuade them to become believers in their Messiah.

Nevertheless, we should ask the question here, What exactly does Luke, and therefore Paul, mean by the “Kingdom of God.” I will list five options below, but they will require explaining from 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, Revelation 20:4-6, and 1 Corinthians 15:42-44, which I will quote and briefly analyze afterwards. Therefore, I encourage the reader to look through the following options and then reread them more carefully after I have discussed these other three passages. We want to know, Is Paul referring to the Kingdom of God –

- 1) to which only the Jews could look forward *on earth*, i.e., being a “great nation” as mortal, changed of heart, authentically believing, and yet morally depraved Jews on the land of Israel as promised in Genesis 12:2, or
- 2) to which only the Jews could look forward *on earth* AND *in heaven*, i.e., a “great nation” as mortal, changed of heart, authentically believing, and yet morally depraved Jews on the land of Israel as promised in Genesis 12:2, AND eternal life as immortal, morally perfect Jews, which is the same eternal life as expressed by Jesus and the New Testament authors (cf. Matthew 19:16; John 3:16; Romans 6:23, etc.), or
- 3) to which both Jews and Gentiles could look forward *on earth*, i.e., a “great nation” comprised of both mortal Jews and mortal Gentiles on the land of Israel as in #2 above, or
- 4) to which both Jews and Gentiles could look forward *in heaven*, i.e., eternal life as immortal beings as in #2 above, or
- 5) to which both Jews and Gentiles could look forward *on earth* AND *in heaven*, i.e., a “great nation” of mortal Jews as in #2 above, ruled by Jesus and immortal, morally perfect Jews and Gentiles, AND eternal life as in #2 above, ruled by Jesus in a kingdom comprised of immortal, morally perfect Jews and Gentiles?

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, Revelation 20:4-6, and 1 Corinthians 15:42-44 & 50-53 are necessary to explain why I am emphasizing the words mortal and immortal in these five options. 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 reads,

1 Thessalonians 4:13 On another subject, we do not want you to be ignorant, brothers, concerning those who are dead, so that you do not grieve as do, indeed, the rest, who have no hope. **4:14** Because we believe that Jesus died and rose from the dead, it is just as certain that God also will bring with him those who died in the light of Jesus.

4:15 This we say to you by means of the message of the Lord, that we who are alive, who remain until the coming of the Lord, will definitely not precede those who have died, **4:16** because the Lord

himself, when the command is given by means of the voice of the archangel and the trumpet of God, will come down from heaven, and the dead in the Messiah will themselves rise up first. **4:17** Then we, who are alive and who remain, will be snatched away together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and thus we shall always be with the Lord. **4:18** Therefore, encourage one another with these words.

Between A.D. 50-54, the apostle Paul traveled from Antioch on the Orontes in northwest Syria to Greece and back, the story of which is covered in Acts 15:40-18:22. Thessalonica, in the northern area of Greece called Macedonia, was one of the cities he visited, and Acts 17:1-10 describes the hostile reaction he received from the Jews in this city, to the extent that Paul had to flee for his life. Probably about six months later, during his year and a half stay in Corinth, south of Thessalonica, Paul writes 1 Thessalonians in order to encourage the newly converted Thessalonian Christians in their faith, for which they are continuing to experience persecution, just as Paul had. Timothy, Paul's co-worker, did revisit Thessalonica and has returned to Corinth and reported on the Thessalonians' condition. One issue that is confusing them is what will happen to their fellow Christians who have died within the last six months and who have not survived until the actual second coming of Jesus. Paul writes the above section of chapter 4 to encourage them that they have nothing to worry about.

He is speaking specifically of Jesus' second coming, and he says that two kinds of people will join Jesus "in the air" above the earth when he comes. The first are "those who died in the light of Jesus," i.e., those who had gained authentic, biblical belief during their lives on earth and yet died before Jesus' return. These will include not only New Testament Christians but also Old Testament believers such as Abraham, Moses, David, and others, whose death was just as much "in the light of Jesus" as that of New Testament believers. The reason is that the means by which both Old Testament believers and New Testament believers obtain God's eternal mercy is having Jesus as their advocate before Yahweh at their resurrection. Thus, the first people to experience Jesus' advocacy will be all the believers in all of history who have died prior to his return and for whom Jesus appeals to the Father for mercy when He resurrects them from the dead while he is descending to earth to establish his millennial kingdom (cf. Revelation 20:4-6 below).

The second kind of people who join Jesus "in the air" are those "who are alive and who remain." These are authentic believers living at the very moment when Jesus returns, who will be lifted off the earth and meet both Jesus and those who are resurrected because of their previous genuine belief. Now, the question is, Where will both these kinds of people "always be with the Lord?" And the answer is in Revelation 20:4-6,

Revelation 20:4 I saw thrones, and they sat on them. And judgment was given to them. And I saw those persons who had been beheaded on account of their bearing witness to Jesus and on account of God's message, indeed who had not worshiped the beast or his image. Nor did they receive the mark on their forehead and their hand. And they came to life and reigned with the Messiah for a thousand years.

20:5 The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were completed. This is the first resurrection. **20:6** Happy and set apart is he who has a part in the first resurrection. The second

death has no authority over these. Instead, they will be priests of God and the Messiah, and they will reign with him for a thousand years.

First, we should note that verses 5 & 6 indicate that there will be two resurrections of the dead. The first resurrection involves those who are deemed “happy and set apart,” because they will be “priests of God and the Messiah,” who will rule over the millennial kingdom with Jesus. These are authentic believers who have died prior to Jesus’ return and are brought back to life to participate with him in his temporary reign on earth. It is possible to construe the language here as referring to the resurrection of each believer immediately after he has died, like the popular perspective among Christians and other people today. However, it makes more sense in line with the whole context to hear John saying that this is a group resurrection that takes place at the same time as Jesus’ return, while the second resurrection will also be a group one at the end of the millennial kingdom and will involve unbelievers who have died prior to it. These latter people will encounter God’s final judgment and destruction, what John calls “the second death.” This interpretation of two group resurrections, the first at the second coming of Jesus and the second at the end of his messianic kingdom on the land of Israel, also correlates with Paul’s statement in 1 Thessalonians 4:16 above to the effect that “the dead in the Messiah will themselves rise up first.” It is not all the dead who are raised at Jesus’ second coming. It is only those who have had authentic, biblical belief before they died.

It is also interesting that verse 4 mentions only those who have died as a result of the world’s hostility towards them, because they were committed followers of Jesus as the Messiah. However, this could be simply those whom the book of Revelation wishes to highlight, who had authentic belief during their lives, suffered for their belief, and died prior to the return of the Messiah. Therefore, while this verse means Christian martyrs, its relevance extends to all authentic believers who have died in history, going back even to Abraham, who did not die a violent death for his faith in Jesus, but who died peacefully with his faith in Yahweh, the Father of Jesus, the Son of God and Messiah. The result of the resurrection of all these people is that they rule over the Jews on the land of Israel with Jesus, the supreme ruler, during his millennial kingdom. Also, the relevance of this verse extends to genuine Christians who are living at the exact moment of Jesus’ second coming, who are lifted off the earth to join Jesus and the resurrected believers (cf. 1 Thessalonians 4:17 above). Therefore, they, too, rule over the Jews on the land of Israel during the millennial kingdom.

But another question is, What kind of bodies are the resurrected believers given when God brings them back from the dead? The answer is in 1 Corinthians 15, which is a long chapter and corroborates what Paul says in 1 Thessalonians 4. I will quote the entire chapter here, but we will focus on vs. 42-44 & 50-53,

1 Corinthians 15:1 Now, I make known to you, brothers, the good news that I proclaimed to you, that you also received, on the basis of which you also stand, **15:2** through which you also are being saved, if you hold firmly to that message which I proclaimed to you, unless you believed in vain. **15:3** I delivered to you of first importance what I in turn had received, that the Messiah died for our immoral actions according to the scriptures, **15:4** that he was buried, and that he was raised from the dead on the third day according to the scriptures, **15:5** and that he appeared to Kephias, and then to

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the twelve. 15:6 Then he appeared to more than 500 of the brothers at one time, of whom many are still alive, but some have died. 15:7 Then he appeared to Jacob, then to all the apostles, 15:8 and last of all, as though to an abortion, he appeared even to me. 15:9 For I am the last of the apostles, who is not worthy to call himself an apostle, because I persecuted the gathering of God. 15:10 But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace towards me has not been worthless. Instead, I have toiled more than all of them, yet not I but the grace of God with me. 15:11 Therefore, whether I or those others, thus we proclaim, and thus you believed.

15:12 If the Messiah is being proclaimed as having been raised from the dead, how are some of you saying that there is no resurrection of the dead? 15:13 If there is no resurrection of the dead, not even the Messiah was raised from the dead. 15:14 And if the Messiah was not raised from the dead, then our proclaiming it is vacuous, and your belief is vacuous. 15:15 In addition, we are found to be false witnesses of God, because we testified against God that He raised from the dead the Messiah, whom He did not raise, if it is true that the dead are not raised. 15:16 If the dead are not raised, not even the Messiah has been raised. 15:17 And if the Messiah has not been raised, your belief is useless; you are still in your immoral actions. 15:18 Therefore, indeed, those who have fallen asleep because of the Messiah are lost forever. 15:19 If we have hoped in the Messiah in this life only, we are of all men most to be pitied.

15:20 However, the Messiah was raised from the dead—the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep. 15:21 After death resulted from one man’s actions, indeed, resurrection from the dead resulted from one man’s actions. 15:22 For just as all men die in the footsteps of Adam, thus also all men will be made alive in the footsteps of the Messiah, 15:23 and each in his own turn—the Messiah, the first fruits, then those who belong to the Messiah at his coming.

15:24 Then comes the end when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father, when He abolishes every rule, and every authority and power. 15:25 For He must reign until He places all of his enemies under his feet.

15:26 The last enemy that will be abolished is death.

15:27 For he has put all things in subjection under his feet <Psalm 8:6>.

When it says, “All things have been put in subjection,” it is evident that this means except the One who puts all things in subjection to him. 15:28 And when all things have been put in subjection to him, then also the Son himself will be in subjection to Him who put all things in subjection to him, in order that God may be all in all.

15:29 Otherwise, what will those who were baptized because of the dead do? If the dead are not raised at all, why then are they baptized because of them?² 15:30 Why then are we in danger every hour?

15:31 On the basis of the boasting that I do in you, which I have in the Messiah Jesus our Lord, I die

² ἐπεὶ τί ποιήσουσιν οἱ βαπτιζόμενοι ὑπὲρ τῶν νεκρῶν; εἰ ὅλως νεκροὶ οὐκ ἐγείρονται, τί καὶ βαπτίζονται ὑπὲρ αὐτῶν – It makes more sense to translate the ὑπὲρ as “because of.” Baptism was a common religious practice in that area in that day, and people thus expressed their belief in Jesus as the Messiah who rescued them from the death that the dead had already died in order to gain eternal life. Why make such an expression of belief if resurrection and eternal life are not a reality? Therefore, what Paul means is that people were baptized because they wanted to identify not only with the Messiah, who died on their behalf and who demonstrated that they deserved eternal death for their moral depravity, but also to identify with those who had already died and yet would be raised from the dead to gain eternal life because of their authentic belief. In other words, Paul and his fellow 1st century Christians realized that the Messiah could return within their lifetimes, which is the correct manner for all Christians down through history to live.

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daily. 15:32 If from strictly human motives I fought with wild beasts in Ephesus, what did that profit me? If the dead are not raised, “Let us eat and drink for tomorrow we die.” 15:33 Don’t be deceived: “Bad company corrupts good morals.” 15:34 Sober up for uprightness’ sake, and do not commit immorality.

Some people have no knowledge of God. I say this to your shame, 15:35 because someone will say, “How are the dead raised? And with what kind of body do they appear?” 15:36 Fool, that which you sow does not bring about life unless it dies. 15:37 And that which you sow, you do not sow the “body” that it will become, but bare grain, perhaps of wheat or something else. 15:38 And God gives to it a “body” just as He desired, and to each of the seeds its own “body.”

15:39 Not all organic material with blood flow is the same organic material, but there is one organic material of men, another of animals, another of birds, and another of fish. 15:40 There are both heavenly bodies and earthly bodies. Nevertheless, on the one hand, the greatness of the heavenly bodies is one level of greatness, and, on the other hand, the greatness of the earthly bodies is another level of greatness. 15:41 The brightness of the sun is one level of brightness, the brightness of the moon is another level of brightness, and the brightness of stars is even a third level of brightness, even while one star differs from another star in brightness.

15:42 Thus, also, is the resurrection of the dead. Their bodies are sown in a state of decaying. Their bodies are raised in a state of not decaying. 15:43 Their bodies are sown in a state of lack of acclaim. Their bodies are raised in a state of acclaim. Their bodies are sown in a state of weakness. Their bodies are raised in a state of power. 15:44 A physical body is sown. A spiritual body is raised. If there is a physical body, there is also a spiritual body.

15:45 Thus, it is also written,

The first man, Adam, became a living being <Genesis 2:7>.

The last Adam became a life-producing spirit.

15:46 Nevertheless, the spiritual is not first, but the physical. Then comes the spiritual. 15:47 The first man was out of the earth for the earth. The second man was out of heaven for heaven. 15:48 As was he who was earthy, so also are those who are earthy. And as is he who is heavenly, so also are those who are heavenly. 15:49 And just as we have born the image of him who was earthy, we also will bear the image of him who is heavenly.

15:50 This I say, brothers, that flesh and blood are not able to inherit the Kingdom of God, and that which can be destroyed does not inherit immortality. 15:51 Behold, I tell you a mystery. We shall not all be put to sleep, but we shall all be changed 15:52 in a moment, in the blink of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised immortal, and we shall be changed. 15:53 This is because it is necessary for this destructibility to put on indestructibility and this mortality to put on immortality.

15:54 When this destructibility has put on indestructibility and this mortality has put on immortality, then will come about the statement that has been written,

Death was swallowed up in victory <Isaiah 25:8>.

15:55 Death, where is your victory? Death where is your goad <Hosea 13:14>?

15:56 The goad of death is moral depravity, and the power of moral depravity is the Torah.

15:57 But thanks be to God who gives us victory through our Lord Jesus the Messiah. 15:58 Therefore, my brothers whom I love, be steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the message of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not empty in the Lord.

Fortunately for us, about two years after Paul has spent 18 months in Corinth, the Corinthian Christians need a lot of help being regrounded in their understanding of the message of Jesus as the Messiah, so that Paul writes four letters to them from Ephesus around A.D. 56. 1 Corinthians is actually his second letter. We have lost his 1st and 3rd letters, so that 2 Corinthians is his fourth letter to this rather confused group of Christians. There is much in 1 Corinthians 15 that commends itself to our discussion. This chapter begins with Paul's restating the basics of the gospel—the Messiah Jesus died, was raised from the dead, appeared to his disciples and apostles, and became the very means to escape God's eternal condemnation that would naturally result from our being evil human beings.

In the rest of chapter 15, Paul argues that it does not make sense that some of the Corinthian Christians are claiming that there is no resurrection from the dead (one of their many misguided beliefs to which Paul responds in this long letter). They believe either that there is no eternal life at all, or that a Christian must survive on earth until the return of the Messiah in order to gain eternal life. In any case, Paul demonstrates that, if there is absolutely no resurrection from the dead, then not even Jesus is currently alive, which nullifies anyone's hope to be rescued from God's eternal condemnation and gain eternal life. This means that our contemporary human existence is all that a person experiences, making all of us creatures who can only be pitied. Paul's declaration here is an apt response to thoroughgoing atheistic naturalists in our modern world. What could possibly be the point of enduring human existence in the present realm if there is no such thing as eternal life after death? The answer to this question is simply, None, which is a thoroughgoing nauseating answer.

But Paul states unequivocally that the Messiah Jesus was made alive by God after his crucifixion, death, and burial, so that he is the first of human beings to undergo this powerful work of God and will be followed in this resurrection experience by "those who belong to the Messiah at his coming" (v., 23). Paul is referring to authentic believers who have died in history prior to Jesus' return—both Old Testament and New Testament believers, which coincides with the 1 Thessalonians 4 passage.

If we skip down to v. 34, we see that Paul challenges the Corinthian Christians who might still be skeptical of the concept of resurrection, and he asks what kind of body will God cause the resurrected believers to have. His argument is—if God can cause a seed to "die" in the ground and "rise from the dead" to grow into a plant, if God can create different kinds of organic beings such as human beings, animals, and birds, and if God can create objects above the earth which exhibit different levels of light, e.g., the sun, the moon, and the stars, then certainly God can take a mortal human body which has died and make it alive again with an immortal body (vs. 34-44). Therefore, Paul is saying in these verses that God

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will give immortal and morally perfect bodies to those whom He resurrects from the dead at Jesus' second coming.

He goes on to say in vs. 50-53 that God will also transform and change the bodies of authentic believers who are alive when Jesus returns and whom God lifts off the earth to "meet him in the air" as stated in 1 Thessalonians 4:17. And the transformation will be that from mortal and morally depraved bodies to immortal and morally perfect bodies, just like those of the resurrected believers. At the final moment of Jesus' return, "the dead will be raised immortal, and we [who are alive at this moment] shall be changed..., because it is necessary for this destructibility to put on indestructibility and this mortality to put on immortality" (cf. vs. 52 & 53).

Putting together the ideas from 1 Thessalonians 4, Revelation 20, and 1 Corinthians 15, the five options above for what Paul means by the Kingdom of God in Acts 28 include these newly resurrected and transformed believers, both Jews and Gentiles, both of Old Testament times and New Testament times, who are all immortal and morally perfect. They will exist with the mortal inhabitants on the land of Israel during Jesus' millennial kingdom and will also be the immortal inhabitants of the eternal Kingdom of God of the future realm, along with the mortal inhabitants on the land of Israel who themselves are eventually transformed into immortal beings.

Once we look at all the relevant passages in Acts, we will see that option #1 does not make any sense. Paul has dedicated the previous twenty years or so trying to persuade Jews and Gentiles to believe that Jesus is God's means to their obtaining eternal life. Therefore, to think that, in this context, he is referring to only the Jews' hope of an earthly kingdom is incorrect. Paul could be narrowing his meaning as in option #2 to include only Jews in the temporary and eternal Kingdom of God, because he is talking to only Jews. Plus, he has mentioned the "hope of Israel," which fits nicely with this interpretation. However, we will see in v. 28 that his idea of the Kingdom of God extends beyond the Jews to the Gentiles. Option #3 does not make any sense also in the light of Paul's duty of announcing eternal life through Jesus to the Gentiles. For Paul, even when talking to Jews who are the recipients of God's promises through Abraham, the Kingdom of God cannot be only a temporary, earthly kingdom. Option #4 is popular in the Gentile Christian community today, so that the New Testament is viewed as radicalizing the Old Testament in such a way that Jesus and the mostly Gentile church with its heavenly destiny has completely replaced the nation of Israel with its earthly destiny. As a result, the Old Testament is interesting in its presentation of God's promises to the Jews and their history, but it is instructive only because Jesus has fulfilled God's promises in a more expansive and eternally significant way, rendering His earthly promises somewhat wrong and much less important to the point of being irrelevant.

If I am correct about the book of Joel and my conclusions from the book of Acts, Paul in his discussions with these Jews in Rome in A.D. 62 is referring to option #5. He is concentrating on helping them grasp the fact that Jesus as the Messiah is God's major means to fulfilling all His promises to Abraham's physical descendants—both of making them a great nation on the land of Israel and of granting them eternal life in a future realm, while also informing the Jews that God is bringing Gentiles into the community of believers in Jesus for the sake of their eternal salvation and life.

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Let me state here a fundamental, implicit issue to which we will return later in our journey through all the relevant passages in Acts. This is that “forgiveness of sins through Jesus Christ” (as we Christians like to talk about it) is necessary not only for anyone’s obtaining eternal life “in heaven,” but also for any future, mortal Jew’s obtaining existence in the earthly messianic kingdom when Jesus returns. As a result, Paul is legitimately urging his Jewish listeners to embrace Jesus as their Messiah not only for the sake of the hope of Israel that God will grant people eternal life, but also for the sake of the hope of Israel that God will make of them a great nation. The ramifications of this is that forgiveness of sins through Jesus is not only an eternal and “heavenly” issue. It is also a temporary and earthly issue—*for the mortal Jews living on the land of Israel* when Jesus returns and sets up his messianic kingdom in Jerusalem. Just as someone cannot gain eternal life without God’s forgiveness through Jesus, so also a mortal Jew cannot gain earthly existence in Jesus’ millennial kingdom without God’s forgiveness through Jesus. We will talk about this more later.

In the meantime, we also see that Paul has some sharp words for the Jews who are rejecting Jesus. In Acts 28:25-27, he quotes Isaiah 6:9,10, the Hebrew of which reads,

Isaiah 6:9 And He said, Go and say to this people, Listen intently, but you will not understand. Look carefully, but you will not know.

6:10 Cause the hearts of this people to be insensitive. Cause their ears to be unresponsive. And cause their eyes to be blind, lest they see with their eyes, they hear with their ears, they understand with their hearts, they turn, and they heal with it.

The Hebrew is very close to what Paul says in Greek by quoting mostly from the LXX,

Acts 28:26 Go to this people and say, You will keep on hearing, but you will not understand. You will keep on seeing, but you will not see. **28:27** For the heart of this people has become dull, with their ears they barely hear, and they have closed their eyes. Otherwise, they see with their eyes, they hear with their ears, they understand with their heart, and they turn, so that I heal them <Isaiah 6:9,10>.

Briefly, in Isaiah 6 God looks for someone to speak to the Jews living in the southern Kingdom of Judah around 740 B.C. He wants to indict them for their hardheartedness and warn them of His impending judgment which will result in the destruction of their cities and their being scattered into Gentile lands. If this is what Isaiah 6:9,10 means, how can Paul legitimately use these verses to refer to Jews in the 1st century A.D.? He can by reminding his Jewish guests that “their fathers,” the Jews of the 8th century B.C., were hardhearted, and that they are simply following in their footsteps, thus implying that they are not obeying or heeding the warning of Isaiah 6. They should embrace the message of Jesus as the Messiah as their “fathers” should have embraced God’s message in Old Testament times, but they are not. Indeed, Paul’s presentation of God’s plan to use Jesus to fulfill the whole “hope of Israel” is a legitimate litmus test of these Jews’ hearts. Do they have changed hearts which lead not only to recognizing biblical truth, but also to believing this truth? Or are their hearts hard, like the Jews’ of the 8th century B.C.? Paul, of course, is telling the unbelieving Jews that it is the latter, which becomes an important example of how the New Testament authors/speakers refer to the Old Testament while applying its meaning and relevance in a New Testament context. God spoke to and about these Roman Jews’ “fathers” (ancestors) in

the 8th century B.C., but “this” rejection of God by the Roman Jews in Paul’s day can be said to be “that which was spoken of through the prophet” Isaiah—to use the same wording which we will see that Peter uses in Acts 2. The hardheartedness of the 8th century B.C. Jews is at play in Paul’s Jewish contemporaries, just as the Spirit of God’s work in the Jews when Jesus returns is at play in his disciples and apostles on the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2.

Paul finishes his instructing the Jews in Acts 28 by stating that the same message which they are rejecting, this message of “salvation,” has already gone out to the Gentiles, and their response has been and will continue to be a positive one. The Gentiles are embracing the Jewish Messiah as king and priest, while many of the Jews present in the room with Paul are rejecting their own Messiah.

As a result, we have another clue as to why Luke ends the story of Acts in this manner. He is showing that Paul’s first conversation in Rome is with Jews, not only because they are the chosen people of God as Abraham’s physical descendants, but also because they are hoping that God will make of them a great nation on the land of Israel, as well as grant them eternal life. In other words, the Jews are in a position of priority when it comes to the biblical message, including the New Testament message—in comparison to the Gentiles. Nevertheless, the Gentiles may (or even do) respond more positively than the Jews to the good news of the *Jewish* Messiah. But perhaps this is only for a while (indeed, a long while since we are now almost 2000 years down the road since Jesus’ first coming), as I think Joel is saying. We will look at the other relevant passages in Acts to see if this conclusion bears out.

Acts 26:1-32

Moving on, or back, there were two events in Paul’s life which resulted in his being sent to Rome by the governing authorities to have a chat with Emperor Nero. The first was his arrest in Jerusalem in Acts 21 for purportedly breaking Jewish law. The second was his incarceration in Caesarea Maritima and conversations with Felix and Agrippa in Acts 24 and 26 respectively. We will first look at Paul’s defense before King Agrippa in Acts 26. This man’s full name was Marcus Julius Agrippa II, and he was the great-grandson of Herod the Great, the first man to be granted by the Roman Senate the title King as the vassal ruler of the land of Israel around 59 B.C. After Herod the Great’s death near A.D. 4, his “kingdom” was divided into four parts among his sons. King Agrippa succeeded Herod Antipas, Herod’s son who executed John the Baptist and played a significant role with Pontius Pilate in the crucifixion of Jesus. Agrippa is ruling over one of the more northerly parts of Herod the Great’s kingdom near the Sea of Galilee. Here in Acts 26 he has come to pay his respects to the governor Festus of the southerly portion called Judea. Festus has replaced Felix, who will be Paul’s interlocutor in the next passage we examine in Acts 24. In a separate conversation, Festus has asked Paul if he is willing to return to Jerusalem to stand trial there. Paul refuses and appeals to Caesar, meaning that, as a Roman citizen, he demands the right to be tried by the supreme ruler of the Roman Empire. Festus is legally obligated to comply with Paul’s request. But before he sends him to Rome, he gives Paul the opportunity to explain his case to King Agrippa, who is visiting Festus. Thus Acts 26:1-32 reads,

Acts 26:1 And Agrippa said to Paul,

You are permitted to speak for yourself.

Then, Paul stretched out his hand and made his defense,

26:2 Concerning all the things of which I am accused by the Jews, King Agrippa, I consider myself fortunate to make my defense before you today, **26:3** especially because you are one who knows all the traditions and questions in accordance with Jewishness. Therefore, I ask you to listen to me patiently. **26:4** All the Jews have known my way of life from my youth, that which took place from the beginning among my people and in Jerusalem (**26:5** since they have known about me for a long time, if they are willing to bear witness), that I have lived as a Pharisee according to the strictest faction of our religion. **26:6** And now I stand to be judged for waiting expectantly for the promise made by God to the fathers. **26:7** This is the promise which our twelve tribes are waiting expectantly to arrive, while serving earnestly night and day. Concerning this hope, King, I am being accused by the Jews. **26:8** Why is it considered unbelievable among you if God raises the dead?

26:9 Therefore, I thought to myself that I must do many things in opposition to the name of Jesus of Nazareth, **26:10** which I did in Jerusalem. After receiving authority from the chief priests, I locked up in prison many of those who had been set apart. And when they were being killed, I cast my vote. **26:11** Plus, when I often punished people in all the synagogues, I forced them to blaspheme. And all the more being enraged at them, I pursued them even to foreign cities. **26:12** In the midst of these things, I was going to Damascus with the authority and decision of the chief priests. **26:13** At midday, King, I saw on the way a light from heaven, above the brightness of the sun, and shining all around me and those who were traveling with me. **26:14** After we had all fallen to the ground, I heard a voice speaking to me in the Hebrew language,

Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? It is hard to kick against the goads.

26:15 And I said, Who are you, Sir? And the Lord said,

I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. **26:16** But get up and stand on your feet. For this purpose, I have appeared to you, to appoint you a servant and witness of the things which you have seen, namely, me, and of the things in which I will appear to you, **26:17** when I rescue you from the people and from the Gentiles, to whom I am sending you, **26:18** to open their eyes, so that they may turn from darkness to light, and from the authority of Satan to God, so that they receive forgiveness of their evil actions and an inheritance among those who have been set apart by belief in me.

26:19 Consequently, King Agrippa, I did not become disobedient to the heavenly vision, **26:20** and I continued declaring to those in Damascus first, to those in Jerusalem, throughout the region of Judea, and to the Gentiles, to repent and turn to God, performing actions worthy of repentance. **26:21** Because of these things, the Jews seized me while I was in the temple and attempted to kill me. **26:22** Therefore, having obtained help from God, I stand this day bearing witness to the small and to the great, saying nothing outside the things of which the prophets and Moses said regarding things that were going to happen, **26:23** that there would

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be a suffering Messiah, that by virtue of the resurrection from the dead, he would be the first to proclaim light to the people and to the Gentiles.

26:24 After he said these things in his defense, Festus said in a loud voice,

Paul, you are insane. The many writings are driving you into insanity.

26:25 But Paul said,

I am not insane, most excellent Festus. But I am speaking words of truth and good sense, **26:26** because the king knows about these things. And I am speaking to him with boldness, since I am persuaded that none of these things are hidden from him, for this has not been done in a corner. **26:27** King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know that you believe them.

26:28 Agrippa replied to Paul,

In a short time, you will persuade me to make of myself a Christian.

26:29 And Paul said,

I would pray to God, in a short and in a long time, not only you, but also all who are listening to me today, would become such as I am, except for these chains.

26:30 The king stood up, along with the governor, Bernice, and those who were sitting with them,

26:31 and after they had left, they were saying to one another,

This man is not doing anything worthy of death or imprisonment.

26:32 And Agrippa said to Festus,

This man could be released if he had not appealed to Caesar.

The conversation begins with Agrippa's granting permission to Paul to make his defense before him. Paul first comments that Agrippa understands well the present day Judaism. He then says that all the Jews know him, Paul, well, because he was a member of the strictest sect of Judaism, the Pharisees. Paul's next statement is important to our discussion, in that Paul says that his trial concerns his "waiting expectantly for the promise made by God to the fathers" (26:6). The "fathers" are specifically Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, who are Paul's and the other Jews' original ancestors. To each of them God stated that He would give them the land of Israel and descendants, make them a great nation on this land, and use their descendants to bless themselves and the rest of the world with eternal life (cf. Genesis 12:1-3 regarding Abraham; 26:2-5 regarding Isaac; 28:13-15 regarding Jacob).

We should notice, though, that, in both vs. 6 & 7, Paul uses the singular "promise" and not the plural "promises." Is he saying that God intended only one of the above mentioned promises ultimately to be fulfilled with respect to the Jews, the promise of eternal life? Or is he saying that the Jews interpreted God's promises to Abraham as boiling down to only one,

that of eternal life, while He wanted them to interpret His promise as involving all of them? Or, in line with what God wanted as stated in the previous sentence, is Paul using the singular word as a collective noun, so that promise actually means promises and incorporates the earthly land, descendants, and nation of Israel, as well as the eternal kingdom of a new creation?

We should also notice that, in the next verse, Paul asks the question, Why is it considered unbelievable among you if God raises the dead? In this context of Acts 25 and 26, the “you” to whom Paul is referring are the Gentile rulers, Festus and Agrippa, along with their Gentile entourage who surround them in the throne room of the Roman government’s palace at Caesarea Maritima. It may seem that Paul is reducing God’s Abrahamic promises to one, that of eternal life, but this would be because he is speaking to Gentiles, whose participation in God’s promises involves only this one of eternal life. Therefore, it is more likely that Paul is using promise as a collective noun to refer to all those which God made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and that Paul wants to emphasize eternal life for the sake of his Gentile audience.

By saying that the twelve tribes of Israel and he are waiting for God’s promises, Paul means that He has not yet fulfilled His promises, so that it makes sense for him to be waiting for Him to do so. It is worth repeating that the question before us is basically whether Paul is waiting 1) for God to fulfill His promise to Abraham and the Jews to place them securely on their own land and to make them the greatest nation on earth in this temporary realm, or 2) for God to fulfill His promise to Abraham, the Jews, and the Gentiles to place them securely in the eternal Kingdom of God, or 3) for God to do both #1 and #2.³

Paul goes on to explain in v. 7 that “this is the promise which our twelve tribes are waiting expectantly to arrive, while serving earnestly night and day.” Here Paul indicates that this promise involves at least the Jews, “our twelve tribes.” In the light of his saying in the previous verse that he is on trial for “waiting expectantly for the promise made by God to the fathers,” Paul is not criticizing the Jews for still looking for God to fulfill His promises to them, even though Jesus the Messiah has come. For Paul, it is perfectly legitimate for the Jews, and indeed even for him, to be in a state of waiting for what God has promised them. What concerns him now is that people recognize and embrace Jesus as the person through whom God is going to complete the fulfillment of His promises to both the Jews and the Gentiles.

Paul also refers to the Jews’ “serving [God] earnestly night and day.” This they do by performing all the instructions that God gave them through the Mosaic Covenant of Exodus through Deuteronomy. These instructions require that they pay attention to such things as their bringing offerings to God on a continual basis on the land of Israel and in the temple in Jerusalem. In other words, Paul, like his fellow Jews, is connecting the Abrahamic promise of God to the Mosaic Covenant without apology and without criticizing the Jews for pursuing obedience to the latter. Consequently, this is a very Jewish defense by Paul of his work and his appearance at the temple in Jerusalem in Acts 21 when he was arrested. And because it is a very Jewish defense, it makes sense that at least a portion of #2 above is correct, that Paul is waiting for God to place the Jews securely in the eternal Kingdom of God. But why would

³ This is a shortened form of the five options for the “Kingdom of God” listed in the previous section where we considered Acts 28:16-30.

#1 not make sense also, that Paul is waiting for God to place the Jews securely on their land and to make them the greatest nation on earth in this temporary realm—especially if not only the prophets and the book of Revelation corroborate this promise being fulfilled eventually, but also Paul is stating clearly that he and his fellow Jews are still waiting for God to fulfill His promises specifically to them? It would certainly seem that we can go in this direction, that this is the same as “the hope of Israel” in Acts 28:20. And we will see if the rest of the evidence in Acts supports this conclusion.

Paul then relates to Agrippa his conversion from a Jesus-hater to a Jesus-follower and that it involved an encounter with the eternal Jesus on the road to Damascus where Paul was traveling to arrest his followers and bring them back to Jerusalem to put them on trial before the Jewish Sanhedrin. Paul’s new assignment from God through Jesus himself is to proclaim the message of Jesus as the Messiah to both Jews and Gentiles, but mainly to Gentiles. Because Jesus includes the Gentiles, who have no part as mortal beings in the earthly promises by God of living on the land of Israel and being a great nation there, he is referring to the fact that people who hear Paul will switch their allegiance from Satan to God and receive from God not only eternal mercy, but also the “inheritance” or possession of the *eternal* Kingdom of God because of their authentic belief in him. This allows us to say that Jesus was indicating that at least #2 above is correct, so that Paul and his fellow believers in Jesus the Messiah, both Jewish believers and Gentile believers, are waiting for the eternal Kingdom of God. But, again, because Paul speaks of the promise that his fellow Jews are anticipating being fulfilled, #3 with both the mortal Jews’ living on the land of Israel and the Jews’ and Gentiles’ entering into an immortal state of existence makes sense also.

Paul then says that his encounter with Jesus resulted in his declaring to people in Damascus, Jerusalem, and Judea the truth about Jesus. He also went on to proclaim this message, he says, to Gentiles. And it was especially because of this last part that the Jews in Jerusalem wanted to kill him, purportedly for going outside the boundaries of Moses’ instructions to the Jews in the Old Testament. However, Paul affirms that both the prophets and Moses teach unequivocally that the Messiah would suffer and that, after his resurrection from the dead, he would be the first to announce his messianic role to both Jews and Gentiles. We will revisit this last important idea, the explicit proclamation to the Gentiles of the ideas concerning the Jewish Messiah, when we look at Acts 21 when Paul is arrested.

Next, Festus blurts out that he thinks that Paul’s study of the Old Testament has made him insane. Paul’s rebuttal is that he is being as explicit as possible, because he is persuaded that King Agrippa believes the Old Testament prophets to be true. And the conversation ends with the king’s saying that he just might become a Christian if he gives Paul more time to talk, and Paul hopes this is the case for not only the king but also anyone present in the room who is listening to his defense. After Festus and Agrippa leave the room with their entourage, they all agree that Paul is guilty of no crime, should be released, but still must be sent to Rome because he appealed to Caesar.

Thus, this passage confirms that Jesus’ role in human history is very Jewishcentric, so that it makes sense that Paul and the Jews are looking forward to God’s fulfilling all His promises to Abraham of land, descendants, and eternal life, and which include mortal Jews’ becoming a great and powerful nation on earth with their Messiah as their king.

Acts 24:10-22

Our next passage is Acts 24:10-22, which contains Paul's first defense before only Felix, prior to Festus' succeeding him as governor of Judea, and a full two years before the events of Acts 26. This conversation also takes place in Caesarea Maritima on the coast of Israel, and the passage reads,

Acts 24:10 When the governor [Felix] motioned for him to speak, Paul responded,

Knowing that for many years you have been a judge for this nation, I cheerfully make my defense, **24:11** because it is possible for you to note that it was not more than twelve days ago that I went up to Jerusalem to worship, **24:12** and neither in the temple, nor in the synagogues, nor in the city did they find me discussing with anyone or causing a disturbance. **24:13** Nor is it possible for them to present to you evidence of that which they now accuse me. **24:14** But I admit to you that according to the Way, which they call a faction, I thus serve the God of our fathers, believing everything that was written in the Torah and the Prophets, **24:15** having the hope in God for which these men are waiting, that there will be a future resurrection of both the justified and the unjustified.

24:16 Because of this, I also do my best to maintain always a blameless conscience towards God and man. **24:17** And after several years, I came to make gifts to my people and to bring offerings. **24:18** They found me engaged in these in the temple, having been purified, with neither a crowd nor a disturbance. **24:19** However, there were some Jews from Asia, who ought to be present before you and to make their accusation, if they actually have anything against me. **24:20** Or let these men themselves state what crime they found when I stood before the Sanhedrin, **24:21** except for this one statement which I shouted out while standing among them, I am on trial before you today for the resurrection of the dead.

24:22 But Felix, because he understood more precisely the things concerning the Way, put them off by saying,

When Lysias the commander comes down, I will decide your case.

In this defense of his actions in Jerusalem, Paul claims that he serves the same God as the rest of the Jews, but that he is doing so by means of another method, which he calls the Way, because the unbelieving Jews have labelled Christianity with this word. Paul also indicates that he subscribes to the same scriptures as the rest of the Jews, the "Torah and the Prophets," i.e., the Old Testament. However, by saying that he "believes everything that was written in" it, he is implying that their interpretation of the Old Testament is not only different from his, but also erroneous. Otherwise, they would not only understand biblical theology the same as he does, but also consider his actions in Jerusalem and in the temple to be right in line with the instructions in the Mosaic Covenant, instead of accusing him of "causing a disturbance." Therefore, Paul is implying that Jewish adherence to exactly what all the Old Testament teaches is good and right—both for the Jews who are still unbelievers in Jesus as the Messiah and for him who is a believer in Jesus. The logical inference also is that Paul assumes the Old Testament is inerrant and does not need correcting by Jesus and the New Testament. If, in

response to the claims of the new trend in Christianity, Jesus clarifies the Old Testament, he does so only by adding more details, not by changing its meaning.

Despite the difference in interpretations of the Old Testament between Paul and the Jews who wanted to kill him, there is one concept on which they agree that the Old Testament teaches. Paul calls this the “future resurrection of both the justified and the unjustified,” and he also says that this is “the hope in God for which these men are waiting.” Thus, we see that here Paul narrows the meaning of Jewish expectation to simply a future resurrection which will result in eternal life for those who qualify for it. In other words, he does not mention explicitly that the Jews are anticipating God’s establishing them on their land as a great nation, which is what we have been assuming that Paul includes as “the hope of Israel” in both Acts 26 and Acts 28.

Does this mean that we are wrong about Acts 26 and Acts 28? I do not think so, because of all the other clues we have examined in these last two passages—as well as because of Joel, Revelation, etc. But why would Paul list in this conversation in Acts 24 only the resurrection of the dead leading to eternal life as Israel’s hope? Probably because he is speaking with Felix, whom he identifies as “a judge for this nation,” i.e., for the Jews. Felix of necessity is familiar with the Old Testament in order to adjudicate the Jews’ cases in regard to Roman law, so that he must appreciate the nuances of God’s promises to them. Therefore, Paul cuts to the chase for Felix’s sake, that, as a Gentile, he needs to consider the significance of Jesus the Messiah for him—that it is to obtain God’s mercy and *eternal* life. Paul is not concerned with talking to Felix about participating in the future “great nation” of Israel, and, in this way, he is being the consummate apostle to the Gentiles in the presence of a Gentile ruler.

We notice also that the “hope” to which Paul is referring is the “future resurrection of both the justified *and the unjustified* (emphasis mine).” Therefore, the concept of hope in this context has both a positive and a negative connotation, because this is the same event which Jesus calls the “day of judgment” when he references it in regard to the Gentiles who lived in the city of Sodom (cf. Matthew 11:24) and which Revelation 20 describes as a two resurrection judgment. At this judgment, it is possible either that a person receives eternal mercy and life from God (if he is justified so that he participates in the first resurrection of Revelation 20), or that a person receives eternal condemnation and destruction from God (if he is unjustified and participates in the second resurrection of Revelation 20). Paul refers to this event in Romans 2:5 as “the day of wrath and revealing of the righteous judgment of God” and in Romans 14:10 when he says, “And we will all stand before the judgment seat of God.” In his speech to the Athenians, Paul comments in Acts 17:13 that God “has set a day in which He will judge the world with righteousness by means of a man whom he has appointed, after having presented proof to everyone by raising him from the dead.”

Therefore, we discover in Paul’s defense before Felix that the Jews had learned from the Old Testament that God will eventually call all human beings to account at some time in the future, so that it will be necessary to raise from the dead those who have already died. It is possible that the Jews of Paul’s day were thinking that it would be only Jews who would be judged. However, if we take into account their critical attitude towards Gentiles, as for example in Acts 21 when Paul provokes them to try to kill him, it makes more sense to conclude that they believed that God will judge both the Jews and the Gentiles. Indeed, they

probably believed that God would be even more judgmental toward the Gentiles, because they are not the chosen people of God.

A question that we should ask is, Where in the Old Testament could the Jews have drawn the conclusion that there will be “a future resurrection of both the justified and the unjustified”? There is at least one passage. It is Daniel 12:1,2, where a man in a vision, which Daniel has been seeing since Daniel 10:4, makes the statement,

Daniel 12:1 At that time, Michael, the great prince, who stands over the sons of your people, will stand. And there will be a time of distress which has not been made to occur from there being a nation to that time. And at that time your people will be rescued, all who are found written in the book. **12:2** Many of those who are sleeping in the ground of dust will wake up—these to life into perpetuity, and these to shame and loathing into perpetuity.

As the context bears out, the man of Daniel’s vision is speaking of the nation of Israel, the Jews, and he is referring to the same time as Joel’s events, when the Jews will experience God’s judgment in the most intense manner of all history prior to the return of Jesus the Messiah. Nevertheless, God will rescue from this “time of distress” Daniel’s people, the Jews, and specifically those “who are found written in the book,” which means that certain Jews have been chosen by God for temporary salvation from His judgment that is being dispensed on those living on the land of Israel. In this way, Daniel is referring to the “144,000” of the book of Revelation, who are saved from God’s earthly judgment and who also gain eternal salvation from His condemnation.

The man in Daniel 12 goes on to comment that this whole event includes God’s raising from the dead two different kinds of people. There will be those who are raised “to life,” meaning eternal life, and those who are raised “to shame and loathing,” to their feeling the shame of their rebellion against God and to God’s loathing them for having been such. However, in the context, it makes sense that this man in Daniel is speaking about Jews only. Nevertheless, based upon other clues in the Old Testament, such as the fact that God is the Creator of both Jews and Gentiles, the complete significance of such a resurrection of the Jews is that it will also involve the Gentiles.

Consequently, Paul in his defense to Felix is saying that both the unbelieving Jews, who are there in the audience accusing him of a great crime, and he understand that the Old Testament teaches eternal mercy from God, as spoken by the man of Daniel’s vision in Daniel 12:2, and they are both waiting for this. But would it not also make sense that the unbelieving Jews and Paul understand that Daniel 12:1 teaches that God will bring a great time of distress upon the Jews, along with their rescue from judgment both in the temporary realm and in the eternal realm? In line with this, as spoken of in Jeremiah 23, the Messiah will defeat the Jews’ earthly and human enemies as part of his saving certain ones from God’s judgment, and he defeats the Jews’ greatest enemy, God’s eternal condemnation, when he saves them from it. This is to say that the Jews and Paul are both looking to the Messiah, whoever he might be, to be the one who brings about the earthly Kingdom of God in Israel and the heavenly Kingdom of God in eternity—exactly that which the Old Testament predicts. Consequently, Paul is here talking about the same thing as “the hope of Israel” of Acts 28:20, while focusing on eternal life for Felix’s sake as a Gentile.

He continues and ends his defense by describing his innocent actions in Jerusalem and his shouting out before the court of the Jewish leaders, the Sanhedrin, that ultimately he was

on trial for believing in the resurrection of the dead. This presents us with another good reason why Paul narrows “the hope of Israel” to just the future resurrection in his speech to Felix. As he did when he stood before the Sanhedrin of the Jewish leadership, he wants to foment division among his accusers who are both Pharisees and Sadducees, the former who believe there will be a resurrection and the latter who deny it (cf. Acts 23:6-10). In this way, Paul is pointing Felix to the specific aspect of God’s promises which concerns him as a Gentile, and he is keeping his Jewish accusers off balance by making it difficult for them to agree with one another before Felix.

Acts 21:40-22:22

Next, we should look at Paul’s speech before the Jews at the temple when they almost tear him limb from limb, because they believe that he has desecrated the temple by bringing Gentiles into it. This, in turn, led to his arrest and appearance before Felix. My purpose in bringing this passage into our discussion is not because of what Paul says, but because of how the Jews react to what he says, which will be instructive for us. Thus, Acts 21:40-22:22 reads,

Acts 21:40 When [Lysias the Roman commander] gave him permission, Paul, standing on the stairs, motioned with his hand to [the Jews who were accusing him of desecrating the temple], and after a great silence had fallen on them, he said in the Hebrew language,

22:1 Men, brothers and fathers, listen now to my defense to you.

22:2 When they heard that he was speaking to them in the Hebrew language, they became even more quiet. And he said,

22:3 I am a Jewish man, born in Tarsus of Kilikia, but educated in this city, instructed at the feet of Gamaliel, from the precise instruction of the Torah of our fathers, being zealous for God, just as all of you are today. **22:4** I persecuted this Way to the death, binding and delivering over to the prisons both men and women, **22:5** as also the high priest and the body of old men will bear witness concerning me. From them I also received letters to the brothers when I went to Damascus, in order to lead those who were there bound to Jerusalem, so that they may be punished.

22:6 But while I was on my journey and approaching Damascus about noontime, a very bright light suddenly flashed around me, **22:7** and I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying,

Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?

22:8 I answered, Who are you, Sir? And he said to me,

I am Jesus the Nazarene, whom you are persecuting.

22:9 Those who were with me saw the light, but they did not hear the voice of the one who was speaking to me. **22:10** And I said, What should I do, Sir? And the man said to me,

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Get up and go to Damascus, and there it will be told to you all that has been appointed for you to do.

22:11 And because I could not see on account of the intensity of that light, I was led by the hand by those who were with me, and I came to Damascus. 22:12 A certain Ananias, a man well-committed according to the Torah and well spoken of by all the Jews who lived there, 22:13 came to me and stood by me, saying,

Brother Saul, receive your sight.

At that very moment, I saw again towards him. 22:14 And he said,

The God of our fathers has handpicked you to know His will, to see the one who is righteous, and to hear the sound from his mouth, 22:15 because you will be his witness to all men of what you have seen and heard. 22:16 And now, what will you do? Rise up, be baptized, and wash away your immoral actions, while calling on his name.

22:17 And when I returned to Jerusalem and was praying in the temple, I fell into a trance. 22:18 And I saw him saying to me,

Hurry, and leave Jerusalem quickly, because they will not embrace your testimony concerning me.

22:19 And I said, Lord, they themselves understand that I was the one imprisoning and beating in the synagogues those who believe in you. 22:20 And when the blood of your witness Stephen was being poured out, I was the one standing by them and approving, while I guarded the cloaks of those who were killing him. 22:21 And he said to me,

Go, because I will send you far away to the Gentiles.

22:22 They listened to him until this statement, and then they raised their voices and said,

Away with such a man from the land, because it is not lawful for him to live.

A few comments on Paul's speech before we consider the people's reaction to it. Paul identifies himself as a well-taught Jew. With such words as "strictly according to the law of our fathers," some translations make it sound as though Gamaliel and others taught Paul the correct interpretation of the Old Testament. However, this does not make sense, because it would have led to Paul's embracing Jesus as the Messiah, not rejecting him (albeit only if God changed his heart). Therefore, it is better to translate the Greek text as I did, "from the precise instruction of the Torah of our fathers." Paul is not saying that Gamaliel and other Jewish teachers provided him with a precise understanding of the Torah. He is saying that the Torah is precise, whether or not its students are interpreting it correctly. And obviously Paul's audience (and Paul before Jesus confronted him on the road to Damascus and started him down the path of restudying the Old Testament) have not taken the precise instruction

of the Torah and successfully studied it. Otherwise, they would not be so hostile towards Paul and his message of Jesus of Nazareth as the Messiah.

Paul also says that he was “zealous for God” before becoming a Christian and that his Jewish audience are the same. And he says this without criticizing the Jews for being such, even though they are misguided in their thoughts by opposing him. This tells us that Paul does not consider following the Mosaic Covenant an inappropriate way of obeying God. It is the good and right thing to do for Jews. What was missing for him, and what is missing for these Jews listening to him is a correct interpretation of the Mosaic Covenant, whereby they could naturally and easily segue (with changed hearts) to embracing Jesus as the Messiah.

And why are the Jews “zealous for God?” Is it simply because pursuing morality according to God’s instructions in the Old Testament is a good thing to do? Or could it also be because there is something in it for the Jews? Indeed, as we saw in the main part of this paper, God’s fulfilling His promises to the Jews comes in the midst of their fulfilling their obligation to obey the Mosaic Covenant. Thus, we have here another and an indirect reference to “the hope of Israel” of Acts 28:20 which includes all that God said He was going to do for the Jews—give them land, descendants, a great nation, and eternal life, while also using them as His means to grant eternal life to Gentiles. In this way, Paul continues to affirm the Jewishness of the message which he has been assigned by God to present to the Gentiles, so that it does not make sense that God would fulfill His promise to the Gentiles to give them eternal life without His making good on all His earthly promises to the Jews of land, descendants, and transforming them into a strong and powerful nation.

Moving on in Paul’s speech, when Jesus confronts him, he states that he is persecuting him, in spite of the fact that Paul is persecuting believers in Jesus, not Jesus himself. Thus, Jesus identifies intimately with his followers, so that any hostility and ill-treatment of them constitutes the same towards him. We never find out in the New Testament exactly Paul’s whereabouts during the crucifixion of Jesus, but here Jesus is saying indirectly that Paul is guilty of nailing him to the cross, just as much as the Jewish leaders and Romans who commanded and performed it.

Paul then describes Ananias, the man sent by God to explain his new role to him, as “a man well-committed according to the Torah.” As in the case of Paul, was Ananias “zealous for God” before he became a Christian, but he lacked correct understanding of the Old Testament? Probably. Therefore, also like Paul, Ananias has become fully committed to God and obeying the teachings of the Old Testament in the midst of believing in Jesus as his Messiah. This transition from a misguided follower of the Mosaic Covenant to one who correctly understands it has not made Ananias any less committed to the Torah. Instead, He is practicing the commandments of the Mosaic Covenant with equal fervor and better knowledge. This is why Paul can also describe Ananias as “a man...well spoken of by all the Jews” of Damascus. It is logical to think that the Jews who spoke well of Ananias included those who were still rejecting Jesus as their Messiah, because God had not changed their hearts. Therefore, these particular Jews would speak well of Ananias only because he carefully and outwardly followed the Mosaic Covenant, as they themselves were doing. Thus, we see that believing Jews of Paul’s day, such as Ananias, considered their Jewishness according to the Abrahamic and Mosaic Covenants to be of utmost importance, even while they believed in the Jewish Messiah. Paul even demonstrated this genuine and proper concern for his Old

Testament heritage when he came to Jerusalem and worshiped God in the temple according to the practices prescribed in the Jewish Torah—as he explains to Felix (cf. Acts 24:17, “I came [to Jerusalem] to make gifts to my people and to bring offerings [to God]”).

Paul goes on to say here to the Jews in Jerusalem that Jesus himself appeared to him as he was praying in the temple years ago after he had returned from Damascus. Thus, Jesus urges him to leave the city immediately, because the Jews are hostile towards him and his being convinced that Jesus is the Messiah. Jesus also says that after he leaves the city, he should go far away to the Gentiles to fulfill his responsibility of announcing him as the Jewish Messiah who rescues both Jews and Gentiles from God’s condemnation. It is this last statement that triggers an apoplectic attack by his Jewish audience to the extent that they believe that he deserves to die. But why would this statement upset them so? After all, even their own scriptures indicate that Gentiles have been authentic followers of Yahweh and will be even to the end of history when God raises the dead to judge them. But this is probably the clue to answering our question. As an example of the Old Testament passages which speak directly of Gentiles’ obeying Yahweh, notice how Isaiah puts it in Isaiah 2:2-4,

- Isaiah 2:2** And it will happen in the last days that the mountain of the house of Yahweh will become established, with its being the chief of the mountains. And it will be raised above the hills, and all the Gentiles will stream to it.
- 2:3** And many nations will go, and they will say, Come, let us go up to the mountain of Yahweh, to the house of the God of Jacob. And He will teach us from His way, that we may walk in His paths, because Torah goes out from Zion, and the message of God from Jerusalem.
- 2:4** And He will judge between the Gentiles, and He will decide for many peoples. They will hammer their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not lift up a sword against a nation. And they will never again learn war.

Because of the Jews’ study of such passages as Isaiah 2:2-4 above, it is reasonable to assume that those who are listening to Paul react the way they do as if they are saying, “Paul, you idiot! The Old Testament does not say that God is going to send us, or even you, to the Gentiles. Instead, it says that God is going to send the Gentiles to us! Jerusalem is the center of not only the worship of God, but also the learning of God. The Gentiles will finally become peaceful towards each other and even us when they *come here to us* to be taught the Torah. Therefore, you are lying and violating the Torah, and it clearly states that those who violate it by rejecting God’s clear teaching deserve to die.” In this manner, the Jews honestly and sincerely believe that they are defending properly their God-given scriptures. Just as they feel it necessary to guard the divine religious scruples of eating only food that is kosher (as we will see in Acts 10), they also feel it necessary to guard the divine center of worshiping God, the land of Israel, and most specifically Jerusalem. God surely would not permit a Jew to eat food that is not kosher—according to them. God also surely would not send someone out of the land of Israel to encourage others to worship Him properly. However, both of these are true according to the Old Testament and the New Testament. The problem is not what the two testaments are saying. The problem is the Jews’ interpretation of either one.

I also suspect that the last statement by Paul in this speech is not the only one to which they are reacting negatively, but it is the straw which broke the camel’s back. When Paul explains that he was baptized in Jesus’ name and received forgiveness for his immoral actions

in Damascus, this did not probably sit too well with the Jews in Jerusalem for whom the temple was the only place where a good Jew could receive forgiveness from God.

Thus, we find that in all three defenses which Paul makes (to the Jews in Jerusalem in Acts 21, to Felix the governor in Acts 24, and to King Agrippa in Acts 26), he affirms the Old Testament's promises and commandments to the Jews along with the inerrant precision with which it makes these promises and issues these commandments, thus marking the Jewish people as playing a vital role throughout all human history from the time of Abraham until God destroys the present, temporary realm and constructs a new, eternal one. Paul does not clarify and change the Old Testament by explaining how Jesus does so. He clarifies Jesus by using the accurate message of the Old Testament. The "hope of Israel" as presented in the Old Testament, including in the Mosaic Covenant, is exactly the same as the "hope of Israel" in the New Testament. If there is any change that has to take place, it is *the Jews' understanding of the Old Testament*, not the original authors' meaning in the Old Testament. And if there is any clarification that has to take place, it is that *of Jesus by the Old Testament because its passages are foundational to understanding the Messiah*, not that of the Old Testament by Jesus by correcting it. Thus, the additional details gleaned from the four gospel accounts regarding Jesus' life, death, and resurrection make it obvious that Old Testament passages which could be interpreted as referring to people or events other than Jesus' life, death, and resurrection are, in fact, referring to only him. And, to be explicit, the original authors meant to refer to the Messiah's life, death, and resurrection, so that the New Testament is not correcting their meanings, but making it even more obvious that these were their meanings.

In the same manner that he affirms God's Old Testament promises to the Jews, Paul affirms His promises to the Gentiles. The Jews are slated to experience the Kingdom of God on earth as mortal, morally depraved authentic believers in the land of Israel or as immortal, morally perfect beings who are either resurrected and transformed or immediately transformed. Then, both kinds of Jews will enter into the eternal Kingdom of God as immortal and morally perfect beings. The Gentiles will experience both kingdoms as immortal, morally perfect beings, ruling with Jesus during the millennial, earthly kingdom and living with immortal Jews in the eternal kingdom. Does the rest of the book of Acts bear this out? Let us continue our journey backwards through it and see, finally arriving at Acts 2 where Peter quotes Joel.

Acts 17:1-9

Our next passage in Acts is in chapter 17, the first eight verses. This event takes place during Paul's second missionary journey around A.D. 51,52. As with his other trips, he set off from Antioch on the Orontes in modern day Syria. For this journey, he left in A.D. 50, passed through Kilikia (Cilicia in our English Bibles), Lystra (where he picks up Timothy as an apostolic co-worker), the Phrygian and Galatian regions (but is forbidden by God from entering Asia, i.e., Ephesus), Mysia, Troas (where Luke uses the first person plural pronoun "we" for the first time in his account of Acts), Samothrace, Neopolis, and Philippi (where he spends a night in jail). Then, as Acts 17:1-8 tells it,

Acts 17:1 When they had traveled through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a gathering of the Jews. **17:2** And, according to Paul's custom, he went to them, and, for three Sabbaths, he reasoned with them from the scriptures. **17:3** He explained and gave evidence that the Messiah had to suffer and rise from the dead, and

This is the Messiah Jesus, whom I am proclaiming to you.

17:4 Some of them were persuaded and joined up with Paul and Silas, along with a large number of the Greeks who were committed to God, and a number of the leading women. **17:5** But the Jews became jealous and, taking along some of the evil men from the market place, they formed a mob and stirred up the city. They even attacked the house of Jason and were seeking to bring them before the people. **17:6** When they did not find them, they dragged Jason and some of the brothers before the city rulers, shouting,

These men, who are subverting the world, have come here also. **17:7** Jason has welcomed them, and they are all acting contrary to the judgments of Caesar, saying that there is a different king, Jesus.

17:8 They stirred up the crowd and the city rulers, who heard these things, **17:9** and when they had received an assurance from Jason and the rest, they released them.

Thessalonica is in northern Greece, in the area called Macedonia, where Alexander the Great had grown up. In the 1st century A.D., it was a retirement community for Roman soldiers, but, as Luke informs us, it contained a good size Jewish population, probably as a result of the Assyrian exile in 722 B.C. as the Jews eventually spread west into the Indo-European region north of the Mediterranean Sea. While Paul ran into resistance to his message of Jesus as the Messiah from Gentiles a short time before in Philippi and spends a night in jail, in Thessalonica the opposition comes from the Jews.

We saw in his speech to King Agrippa in Acts 26 that he claimed that he never spoke of things which could not be confirmed by "Moses and the prophets," i.e., by the Old Testament, and that one of the most important ideas to be found in the Old Testament was the necessity for the Messiah to suffer death, so that after rising from the dead he could be the first person to proclaim to both Jews and Gentiles all the ramifications of this major event. Here, in Acts 17, Luke tells us that Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles (as we learned from his speeches to the Jews in Jerusalem, to Felix, and to King Agrippa), first goes to the Jews living in Thessalonica to teach them about Jesus, the suffering and resurrected Messiah. And we also find out that he spends three whole Sabbaths arguing from their scriptures that this is exactly the kind of Messiah that the Old Testament clearly and accurately presents and predicts, even though the Jews have misinterpreted the salient passages.

What is the Jews' response? The same that Paul will later encounter in Rome as Luke ends Acts with his conversation with Jews. Some of the Jews believe the truth of the Old Testament which Paul demonstrates to them. Some do not. However, unlike in Rome, the Thessalonian Jews who reject Jesus as the Messiah become so angry with Paul that they

conspire to convince the Roman authorities to execute him as a traitor, because he is “acting contrary to the judgments of Caesar, saying that there is a different king, Jesus.”

But the Jews cannot actually be upset that Paul is proclaiming “a different king,” because they themselves would have had messianic expectations from their study of the Old Testament. Therefore, they are in their own minds and hearts just as guilty as Paul of being traitors to the Roman Caesar. The problem is that Paul is proclaiming a suffering Jewish king, as clearly indicated by Luke’s comments that Paul spent three Bible study sessions with them trying to convince them that their king, who would crush their enemies, would first have to be crushed by their enemies in order to qualify for his role of returning the favor.

For our purposes here with respect to Joel, we see that Paul believes that Moses and the prophets provided clear and irrefutable evidence as divine scriptures to the effect that the Messiah would have to die in order to bring life to others, and that he would have to be seen as a criminal by both the Jews and the Gentiles in order to become their king. As we asked when we were looking at Paul’s speech to Agrippa in Acts 26, is Paul communicating to the Jews in their Sabbath exploration of the Old Testament that Jesus suffered 1) in order to play his part in God’s placing the Jews securely on the land of Israel in this temporary realm, or 2) in order to play his part in leading them and believing Gentiles into the eternal Kingdom of God, or 3) both?⁴ From this passage, we cannot tell. All we can conclude is that the Old Testament is clear enough and complete enough in its inerrant presentation of ideas for Paul to argue convincingly that Jesus the Messiah had to die in order to be the Messiah. Thus, Paul uses the Old Testament to clarify Jesus, not Jesus to correct the Old Testament. The accounts of Jesus certainly clarify the Old Testament by explicitly demonstrating that the various passages which refer to the living, human, suffering, resurrected Messiah who sits at God’s right hand are true of him and him alone. But they do not correct these or other passages, and Paul in no way changes the meaning of the Old Testament in order to show that it is teaching about Jesus of Nazareth as the Messiah.

Acts 15:1-21

Moving back a couple of chapters to Acts 15, we next consider Paul and Barnabas’ behavior, Peter’s comments regarding Cornelius and his family (cf. Acts 10), and James’ observations with respect to the Old Testament, as all these pertain to the question of whether or not God is requiring Gentiles to obey the Mosaic Covenant in order to be *bona fide* followers of Jesus as the Jewish Messiah. Acts 15:1-22 reads,

Acts 15:1 Some men who had come down from Judea were teaching the brothers,

Unless you are circumcised according to the ethics of Moses, you cannot be rescued.

15:2 And after there ensued no small argument and debate between Paul and Barnabas and them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas, along with some of the others of them, should go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and old men concerning this question. **15:3** Having been sent on their way

⁴ Again, this is a shortened form of the above list of five options for the “Kingdom of God” in Acts 28 involving mortal and immortal Jews, as well as immortal Gentiles.

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by the gathering, they were passing through Phoenicia and Samaria, describing in detail the conversion of the Gentiles, and they were bringing great joy to all the brothers. 15:4 When they arrived in Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the gathering, the apostles, and the old men. And they recounted all that God had done with them.

15:5 But some from the faction of the Pharisees stood and said,

It is necessary to circumcise them and to command them to keep the Torah of Moses.

15:6 And the apostles and the old men came together to look into this matter. 15:7 After a lot of debate had occurred, Peter stood up and said to them,

Men, brothers, from the old days God selected among you for the Gentiles to hear by my mouth the message of the good news and to believe. 15:8 And God, who knows the heart, bore witness when He gave them the Holy Spirit just as He had given us. 15:9 Thus, He made no distinction between us and them, when He cleansed their hearts with belief. 15:10 Therefore, why are you now testing God by laying a yoke on the necks of the students, a yoke which neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear? 15:11 Instead, we believe that we are rescued through the grace of the Lord Jesus, in the same way that they also are.

15:12 The whole multitude were silent. In addition, they listened to Barnabas and Paul as they explained what signs and testifying signals God performed among the Gentiles through them. 15:13 After they became silent, James responded,

Men, brothers, listen to me. 15:14 Simeon has explained how God first concerned Himself with taking from the Gentiles a people for His name. 15:15 And with respect to this, the messages of the prophets agree, just as it is written,

15:16 After these things, I will return, and I will rebuild the fallen tent of David. And I will rebuild its ruins and restore it. 15:17 in order that the rest of men may seek Yahweh, and all the Gentiles among them who call on My name among them, says Yahweh, who is doing these things, 15:18 which have been known from the age <Amos 9:11,12>.

15:19 Therefore, it is my judgment that we not add extra trouble to those who are turning to God from the Gentiles, 15:20 but that we write them to distance themselves from the polluted things of idols, from immorality, from that which has been strangled, and from blood. 15:21 For Moses, because of ancient generations, has those who proclaim him in a city, because he is read in synagogues on the Sabbath.

We see that the moral obligations of a Gentile who becomes an authentic believer in the Jewish Messiah first becomes a hotly contested subject at the beginning of Acts 15 when some Jewish believers travel to Antioch on the Orontes in Syria (in contrast to Psidian Antioch in central Turkey) and are teaching the Gentile Christians that God requires them to be circumcised and follow the Mosaic Covenant in order to obtain eternal salvation from God's condemnation. These Jewish Christians are convinced that the only legitimate way for Gentile Christians to follow Jesus is by becoming as Jewish in their behavior as they are.

Paul and Barnabas disagree with them, and it sounds as though words are flowing fast and furious in the conversation (argument) which ensues. A good question for us to ask is, How have these Jewish Christians in Jerusalem come to the conclusion that Gentile believers in their Messiah should also live according to the 613 commandments of the Mosaic Covenant which are spelled out in Exodus through Deuteronomy and which imply obedience to the 1 commandment to Abraham in Genesis 17 to be circumcised? Without including a complete study of Genesis 12-21 (the Abrahamic Covenant), Exodus-Deuteronomy (the Mosaic Covenant), and 1 Samuel-Malachi (the history of the Jews' obedience, or lack thereof, to both the Abrahamic and Mosaic Covenants, along with God's responses through the prophets), I will hazard a guess that it is because the Jews interpreted God as saying that not only are they as His chosen people intended to be one, large physical sign of God, His character, and His purposes to the rest of the world, but also, that the rest of the world must join them completely in their outward sign-ness if they want God to love, forgive, and grant them His gifts, especially the gift of eternal life.

As a result, these Christian Jews cannot fathom a human being's becoming acceptable to God simply on the basis of his heart and fundamental desire to love and obey God in the midst of believing in Jesus. In contrast to these Jews, Paul and Barnabas can. And so can Peter and James. And so can the rest of the Jewish Christian community in Jerusalem—as far as we can tell from the rest of story in Acts 15 which I do not actually quote here.

Thus, Peter recounts to the group his experience in Acts 10 of watching God cause the Roman centurion Cornelius and his family speak about Him in foreign languages that were unknown to these Gentiles, just as God had caused the apostles and their fellow followers of Jesus to do so on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2. Peter claims that, without anything else happening in these Gentiles' lives, such as being circumcised or explicitly following any of the 613 commandments of the Mosaic Covenant, God was declaring them loved, justified, and forgiven, so that He would grant them eternal mercy in the eternal Kingdom of God. This is both huge and tricky. On the one hand, Peter is proving that both Gentiles *and Jews* are declared loved, justified, and eternally forgiven by means of ONLY their inward belief in the Jewish Messiah. On the other hand, he is pointing to a miraculous experience of God's causing people to speak about Him using languages previously unknown to them, in order to demonstrate His acceptance of them. This is huge, because God is making it very obvious that He is moving in people's hearts and causing them to become *bona fide* believers in the Jewish Messiah, Jesus. This is tricky, because we have to ask the question, Should this miraculous experience of speaking in unknown, foreign languages be considered the norm and necessary for all Christians down through history?

We will continue to consider this question as we move backwards in Acts. For the time being, we also notice that Peter refers to the Torah of Moses as a humanly unbearable yoke. Why? Peter provides the clue when he ends his comments with, "Instead, we believe that we [Jews] are rescued through the grace of the Lord Jesus, in the same way that they [Gentiles] also are." If we assume that God gave the Mosaic Covenant to the Jews as that which they should obey in order to obtain at least the earthly promises which God made to them through Abraham, then Paul cannot mean that the covenant itself is bad. As he explains in Romans 7, the Mosaic Covenant is good, while he, a morally depraved human being, is bad. Thus, the unbearable yoke which the Jewish Christians are trying to lay on the shoulders of

the Gentiles is not just the 613 commandments of the Mosaic Covenant. It is the attitude that, through obedience to the covenant, a human being makes himself worthy of God's mercy, even His mercy through the Messiah Jesus. Therefore, there are really two issues in question in Acts 15. One is whether or not the Gentile Christians have any moral obligation to keep the Mosaic Covenant. The other is whether the proper avenue to obtain God's mercy is by earning it—through obedience to the Mosaic Covenant and circumcision.

Regarding this second issue, we have explored in this paper Deuteronomy 10:16 and 30:1-7, where we discovered that the Mosaic Covenant requires an inward change of heart which human beings cannot produce, while God has promised the Jews that He Himself will create this change in them. And Peter is pointing to the fact that even certain Jews among the Christians in Jerusalem believe that they in and of themselves can change their hearts in order to obey sufficiently the Mosaic Covenant and God so as to obtain His mercy. He is also implying that they believe that they make themselves worthy of His mercy when they do so. However, since encountering the Messiah Jesus and understanding the truth of the Old Testament correctly, Peter and all the apostles now know that human beings “are rescued through the grace of the Lord Jesus.” This is to say that not only must God independently initiate and produce inward belief and worship of Him in order for this belief and worship to be biblically authentic, but also, when He does, the human being in whom He has produced these is eternally acceptable and loved by Him. This is what Peter means when he says that God has given the Gentiles “the Holy Spirit just as He had given us,” referring to the apostles' experience of speaking in unknown, foreign languages at Pentecost, which we will consider when we look at Acts 2. With this common experience which God has given the Jews and the Gentiles, He has “made no distinction between” them. In other words, the method which God employs for transforming a morally depraved Jew into a person who stands to gain God's mercy through Jesus is exactly the same as that which He employs for a Gentile. Peter refers to it as God's having “cleansed their hearts with belief,” which is the same as saying that God has circumcised their hearts as mentioned in Deuteronomy 10:16 and 30:1-7. The result for the apostles, Cornelius and his family, and the Gentile Christians in Antioch is that they perform genuine, biblical belief in Jesus as the Messiah.

In addition, Peter must be implying that the covenant which God explicitly declared through Moses in Exodus through Deuteronomy is for only Jews. While Gentiles are inside the Abrahamic Covenant and its promise of eternal life to anyone who mimics Abraham's belief (cf. Genesis 12:1-3), they are outside the Mosaic Covenant and any moral obligation to it. James says as much when he states, “It is my judgment that we add no extra trouble to those who are turning to God from the Gentiles.” The trouble is not only trying to earn God's mercy, but also doing so with obedience to the Mosaic Covenant. James also quotes Amos 9:11,12 to the effect that, in the 8th century B.C., God declares that His purpose for injecting into the creation the final Davidic king, who we now know is Jesus, will be to draw Gentiles to Himself.

But we also see that God through Amos says that He will “rebuild and restore” the Davidic kingdom. As we have considered above in the other passages which we have explored in Acts, there are three options for what God means in Amos. Either 1) He means only that He will bring back the Jewish kingdom in the land of Israel with Jesus as their king. Or 2) God means only that He will bring back the Davidic kingdom in eternity for both Jews and

Gentiles. Or 3) He means that He will do both. I suggest that, in Amos, God means both, because He has in mind that He will fulfill His promise through Abraham to turn the Jews into a great nation on earth, and He has in mind that He will fulfill His promise through Abraham to turn the Jews and Gentiles into an eternally acceptable people who will be granted eternal life. This is to say also that anytime God comments on His fulfilling one of the Abrahamic promises, it implies that He will fulfill all of them. In Acts 15, James understands this and quotes Amos to the effect that God has all along planned to include the Gentiles in His fulfilling His promises to Abraham and the Jews. However, because mortal Gentiles do not officially participate in the earthly Jewish kingdom which will still involve obeying the Mosaic Covenant as part of the Jews' historical obligation to God, James can say that it is important not to bother the Gentiles with this same obligation. The Gentiles are free to wait for their immortal bodies at Jesus' return and later the eternal Kingdom of God in nothing but a moral context outside the Mosaic Covenant instead of in a moral, religious, and ceremonial context, this latter being what is true for the Jews because of the Mosaic Covenant.

For our purposes, these apostles, Paul, Peter, and James, are convinced of the precise teaching of the Old Testament in regard to both the Jews and the Gentiles, even if some of their Jewish brethren have misinterpreted this teaching. And this teaching pertains both to the Jewish obligation to God within the context of the earthly kingdom of the Jews and to the Jewish and Gentile obligation to God within the context of the heavenly eternal kingdom, thus implying that the Jewish Messiah's initial life, death, and resurrection is vital to God's realizing both kingdoms, a concept to which we will return as we also go back further in the book of Acts.

Acts 13:16-52

We now move to Acts 13. Paul has left Antioch on the Orontes with Barnabas for his first missionary journey, which lasts from A.D. 47-48. They arrive in Psidian Antioch in central Turkey, where "on the Sabbath day they entered into the synagogue and sat down." The Jews ask them if they want to say anything, and vs. 16-52 read,

Acts 13:16 Paul stood up, motioned with his hand, and said,

Men, Israelites and those who fear God, listen. **13:17** The God of this people Israel chose our fathers, and He lifted up the people in their stay in Egypt. And with an uplifted arm, He led them out from it. **13:18** Then, for forty years He put up with them in the wilderness. **13:19** After He had destroyed seven nations in the land of Canaan, He divided up their land—**13:20** for four hundred and fifty years. Then, after these things, He gave them judges until Samuel the prophet. **13:21** And they asked for a king, and God gave them Saul, the son of Kish, a man from the tribe of Benjamin, for forty years. **13:22** And when He removed him, He raised up David to be their king, with respect to whom He also said and bore witness,

I have found David, the son of Jesse, a man after My heart, who will do all My wishes

<Psalm 89:20; 1 Samuel 13:14>.

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13:23 From the seed of this man, according to promise, God has brought to Israel a savior, Jesus, 13:24 after John had proclaimed before the appearance of his entrance a baptism of repentance to all the people of Israel. 13:25 And as John was finishing his course, he kept saying,

Who do you suppose that I am? I am not he. But, watch, there is one coming after me, the sandals of whose feet I am not worthy to untie.

13:26 Men, brothers, sons of the offspring of Abraham (υιοὶ γένους Ἀβραάμ), and those who fear God among you, the message of salvation was sent forth to us. 13:27 Now, those who live in Jerusalem, because they ignored him and what is said by the prophets which is read each Sabbath, fulfilled it by condemning him. 13:28 And, even though they found no cause to put him to death, they asked Pilate that he be executed. 13:29 When they finished all that had been written about him, they took him down from the cross and laid him in a tomb. 13:30 But God raised him from the dead. 13:31 He appeared for many days with those who traveled up with him from Galilee to Jerusalem, who now are his witnesses to the people. 13:32 And we are proclaiming to you the good news of the promise that was made to the fathers, 13:33 that God has carried out this promise to their children, to us, when He raised up Jesus, as it was also written in the second Psalm,

You are My son. Today, I have given birth to you <Psalm 2:7>.

13:34 And because He raised him from the dead, no longer to be about to return to decay, thus He has spoken,

I will give you the divinely vital and trustworthy things of David <Isaiah 55:3>.

13:35 Therefore, He also says in a different Psalm,

You will not grant to Your set apart one to see decay <Psalm 16:10>.

13:36 For David, after he had served the purpose of God with respect to his own generation, died, was laid among his fathers, and he saw decay. 13:37 But the one whom God raised, he did not see decay. 13:38 Therefore, let it be known to you, Men, brothers, that forgiveness of immoral actions and all which you are not able to be justified by means of the instruction of Moses, is being declared to you through this man. 13:39 By means of this man, everyone who believes is justified. 13:40 Therefore, be careful that that which was spoken by the prophets does not happen,

13: 41 Look, those who hate, be amazed and be destroyed, because I am performing an action in your days, an action which you would not believe, even if someone were to state it plainly to you <Habakkuk 1:5>.

13:42 While they were going out, they were urging them to speak to them of these matters on the next Sabbath. 13:43 After the synagogue let out, many of the Jews and the worshipping converts from paganism followed Paul and Barnabas, who, speaking to them, were persuading them to continue in the grace of God.

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13:44 When the Sabbath arrived, almost the whole city gathered to hear the message of the Lord. 13:45 But, when the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy and, by blaspheming, were contradicting the things spoken by Paul. 13:46 And Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly and said,

It was necessary that the message of God be spoken to you first. Because you have rejected it and judge yourselves not to be worthy of eternal life, behold, we are turning to the Gentiles.

13:47 Because it is thus that the Lord has commanded us,

I have appointed you as a light for the Gentiles, in order that you may exist for salvation to the end of the earth <Isaiah 42:6;49:6>.

13:48 When the Gentiles heard this, they rejoiced, glorified the message of the Lord, and believed it, as many as had been appointed to eternal life. 13:49 And the message of the Lord was spread throughout the whole region. 13:50 But the Jews stirred up the worshiping women of prominence and the leaders of the city. Thus, they instigated a persecution against of Paul and Barnabas, and they drove them out of their district. 13:51 And they shook off the dust of their feet against them, and they went to Iconium. 13:52 Meanwhile, the students were filled with joy and the Spirit who is different.

We see from the second sentence in Paul's speech that he is affirming what we learned from Genesis 12:1-3. Paul refers to "the God of this people Israel." He also says that God "chose our fathers." Paul is standing in a Jewish synagogue in Psidian Antioch, and he is addressing his listeners as "Israelites and those who fear God," the former being Jews and the latter being Gentiles who have converted from pagan idolatry to Judaism. It therefore makes sense to interpret "this people Israel" as Jews, the physical descendants of Jacob, whose name God changed to Israel, and who was Abraham's grandson through the child whom God promised to him, Isaac. Thus, God "chose [Paul's and the Jews'] fathers," Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the three great patriarchs of the Jews, so that they all are God's people. For God to "choose" the first male heads of the Jews is the same as God's promising the Jewish people certain things in order to do something significant with them in human history, which also requires that they behave in a particular way which reveals that they truly are His people. Thus, around 2000 B.C., God selected Abraham out of all the Semitic people living in Ur of the Chaldees and promised that he would have descendants who would live on a land which God would give them, that he would obtain eternal life and be the paradigm of all human beings who obtain it, and that God would eventually mold Abraham's descendants into the greatest nation in history. Later, God reaffirmed this promise to Abraham's son Isaac and then to his grandson Jacob. Five hundred years after Abraham, God gave his descendants the Mosaic Covenant, which taught them how they should live in a manner that demonstrates to the Gentiles their identity as His people.

Then, Paul recounts more of Israel's story—their temporary stay in Egypt, their journey in the Sinai desert on their way home to the land of Canaan, God's leading them into this land, His conquering the Canaanites and dividing the land into specific portions for each tribe of Israel, His giving them rulers called judges ending with Samuel, who was also a prophet, an authorized spokesman on behalf of God, and His providing them with their first king, Saul, and then their second king, David. Paul uses a quote from Psalm 89:20 to

indicate that David was a special person in God's mind, because He chose the line of David to be that from which He "has brought to Israel a savior, Jesus."

Paul could be describing all this Jewish history only to demonstrate that the Jews' and Gentiles' savior from God's judgment and for the sake of the eternal Kingdom of God arrived through the exact process which God prescribed in the Old Testament. Or he could be offering this history to demonstrate his own agreement with the Jews in the Psidian Antioch synagague that they and he are part of an important historical experiment and purpose which God is seeing through to the end of the present realm by using Jesus as the Jews' savior from God's judgment and all their enemies when he sets up his kingdom in Jerusalem. Or he could have had both in mind with an emphasis on the fact that Jesus' saviorhood begins with the Jews, both in this realm and for the sake of the next, and moves on to the Gentiles for the sake of their immortal participation in the present and next realm. Our study of Joel and related passages in Revelation, etc. certainly allows for this third option to be a strong contender for being the correct interpretation of this speech by Paul. This third option also correlates with what we have learned so far in Acts.

In the next part of his speech, Paul once again distinguishes between the Jews, the "sons of the [physical] offspring of Abraham," and the Gentiles who have embraced the Judaism of their day, "those who fear God among you." This ethnic difference is important to Paul, because we are seeing him in Acts connect the Gentile hope of eternal life to the Jewish hope of all the promises of God to Abraham in Genesis 12:1-3. He then briefly describes how it came about that Jesus died on a cross as a common criminal in the minds of the Jews. First, Paul implies that the Old Testament clearly reveals the truth that the Messiah must die in order to fulfill his responsibility by stating that the Jews "in Jerusalem...ignored...what is said by the prophets which is read every Sabbath." He is indicating that the prophets speak inerrant truth with respect to Jesus' suffering death on the cross. Does it make sense to think that they do not speak inerrant truth with respect to other aspects of God's plans and purpose, e.g., His restoring the Kingdom of Israel and creating a new realm for the eternal Kingdom of God, so that neither of Jesus' kingdoms actually exists yet? No, it does not. Jesus is definitely the one and only king of both kingdoms, but he presently is a king without a kingdom. Yet they both are coming!!! Plus, Paul states that God raised Jesus from the dead, and, after this event with multiple appearances to his apostles and students, Paul can now say that "God has carried out this promise [which was made to the Jewish ancestors]" to give them a king, so that Jesus' resurrection was equivalent to Solomon's being crowned king as his father David describes in Psalm 2:7 when God says, "Today I have given birth to you."

God had guaranteed to David that his son Solomon would be His son (cf. 2 Samuel 7:14). As a result, David uses a birth metaphor in Psalm 2:7 to refer to Solomon's coronation. As soon as the crown was placed on Solomon's head around 900 B.C. and they poured oil over it as a symbol of his being the Messiah and King, David says that God "gave birth to him" as His son. Similarly, after Jesus' death, God "gave birth to him" as Israel's Messiah and King when He raised him from the dead, thus indicating that Jesus had qualified for his role of ruling over the Jews (and Gentile believers, too).

Then Paul quotes Isaiah 55:3. The translation of this verse into Greek by the LXX and quoted by Paul uses two interesting words to refer to that which the Hebrew text is saying that God is giving the Jews. The Hebrew phrase is הַיְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ הַיְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ , which is easily

translated, “the loyal loving things and trustworthy things of David,” referring first to the quality of God’s promises to make David’s descendant king forever, i.e., that God really will fulfill His promises because of His “loyal loving things,” and second to the quality of the things that constitute the fulfillment of the promises, i.e., that David’s descendant will be a great king of a great kingdom because he will constitute “trustworthy things” given by God to the Jewish people. Consequently, because the great king comes from God’s constant and abundant loyal love towards David and is a trustworthy gift, he himself has a wonderful quality. The Greek phrase in the LXX, which Paul quotes, is τὰ ὄσια Δαυιδ τὰ πιστά. The first two words denote things which are necessary to a proper relationship between God and His people, which is why I have translated it “the divinely vital” things. The last two words refer to things for which God can be trusted and are wonderful to experience, which is why I have translated it “the trustworthy things.” And God through Isaiah and Paul are saying that these things pertain to David. They are connected to David and, therefore, to the kingdom of Israel, because the Davidic Covenant states that David is the first of a long line of kings of the Jews, such that the final king will never cease his responsibilities. The question for us is, When in human history does the final kingdom of Israel endure without ever coming to an end? The answer involves two stages of the kingdom. When Jesus returns, the prophets and Revelation indicate that his ruling over the Jews from Jerusalem will endure until God destroys the present realm and creates a new one, so that the latter goes on into eternity. Jesus’ ruling the Jews from Jerusalem is the first stage of the final kingdom of Israel, because this will be God’s fulfillment of His promise to Abraham to mold his descendants into the greatest nation on earth. His ruling both Jews and Gentiles in the new eternal creation is the second stage of the final kingdom of Israel, because this will be God’s fulfillment of His promise to Abraham to grant eternal life to him and all those in history who mimic his authentic belief.

This quote from Isaiah 55 and all the history of the Jews which Paul has recounted in this speech easily lead to our concluding that Paul is referring to the vital nature of the death, resurrection, and coronation of the Davidic descendant Jesus for the sake of his becoming the Jews’ king on earth temporarily at the end of history, as well as his becoming the king of the eternal kingdom. As a result, Jesus’ first coming was just as necessary and effective for God’s fulfilling His promise to Abraham to make his descendants, the Jews, eventually into a “great nation,” as it was for God’s fulfilling His promise to grant Abraham (and all human beings who demonstrate similar belief) citizenship in the eternal Kingdom of God (cf. Genesis 12:2,3).

Paul then goes on to remind his Jewish and Gentile listeners in the Psidian Antioch synagogue that David’s body deteriorated and now cannot be found. However, he states categorically that Jesus’ body never experienced decay and is alive and well after God raised him from the dead. And Paul quotes David in Psalm 16:10 to the effect that God would not allow Jesus’ body to undergo decay. When we get to Peter’s speech in Acts 2, we will see that he explicitly declares that David was writing about the future and final Messiah and not about himself. Thus, in Psalm 16, David was looking forward and predicting the resurrection of his Messiah, similarly to how he looked forward in Psalm 110 to this same Messiah, his Lord (*’Adonai*), “sitting at the right hand of God.” David knew that there would be one final descendant of his who would die and be raised from the dead before his body

had any opportunity to endure natural deterioration, and that this same unique King of Israel would also be his king and priest (taking into account even Psalm 110:4, “Yahweh has sworn and will not change His mind, you [David’s Lord of v. 1] are a priest into perpetuity according to the order of Melchizedek” (cf. Hebrews 7-10), thus implying that he, David, would be raised from the dead to experience the eternal kingship and advocate responsibilities of this final king.

Paul also connects Jesus’ death and resurrection to the ability of immoral human beings, and specifically the Jews and Gentiles in the Psidian Antioch synagogue, to receive God’s forgiveness. But here is the catch and the idea to which I said in our discussion of Acts 28 we would return. Because Paul is highlighting Jesus’ role in Israel’s history which will culminate in the Jews’ being made a “great nation” under his leadership on earth in Jerusalem, then he is also indicating that “forgiveness of immoral actions” is necessary for just the Jews in order for God to make them a “great nation.” We can think of it this way. The initial Kingdom of Israel, which comprises only mortal Jews and is equivalent to their being a “great nation,” requires not only that they have a king from God, but also that they all have complete forgiveness from God. This is to say that Jesus plays the double role for only mortal Jews on earth of being their final king and their ultimate advocate before God in order that they may live as authentic believers under Jesus’ leadership on the land of Israel during the millennial kingdom. This is how God fulfills His promise to Abraham to transform his descendants into the greatest nation in all human history.

Thus, even if eternal life were not an option for either Jews or Gentiles, God’s promise in Genesis 12 to cause the Jews to be a “great nation” requires the same role and experience for Jesus that we normally attribute to how people gain life after death in heaven. The method which God uses to provide all people with eternal life is the same one that God uses to provide the Jews with the millennial kingdom of Revelation. On the basis of his death, resurrection, and ascension, Jesus rescues mortal Jews living in the land of Israel not only from their earthly enemies, but also from God’s eternal judgment and condemnation. In this way, Jesus’ death on the cross is vital to the Jews’ becoming a kingdom during the time of the millennial period as described in Revelation 20 and Old Testament passages such as Jeremiah 23 (cf. Addendum A above). Therefore, on the one hand, Jesus’ death on the cross is necessary to provide forgiveness, so that both Jews and Gentiles can escape God’s condemnation and enter into the eternal Kingdom of God. On the other hand, Jesus’ death on the cross is necessary to provide forgiveness, so that only mortal Jews can escape God’s condemnation and enter into the temporary Kingdom of Israel during the millennial period of Jeremiah 23 and Revelation 20. As God declares in Deuteronomy 30, He will circumcise the hearts of all the mortal Jews on the land of Israel when Jesus returns, so that they will genuinely believe in Jesus and become forgiven in order that they live appropriately in the earthly millennial kingdom.

Paul goes on to say that the Mosaic Covenant cannot produce forgiveness for the Jews. Only Jesus can, meaning that God has required a crucified and resurrected human being to be their advocate, regardless of their obeying the Mosaic Covenant with their animal offerings of mercy to God. In other words, even if a Jew has a circumcised heart and is thereby genuinely following the ceremonial and sacrificial commandments of the covenant, he does not obtain God’s forgiveness through these actions. He obtains it through Jesus’

actions and his belief in Jesus as his priest. This is the same message of the book of Hebrews in the New Testament. God's forgiveness of the Jews is never on the basis of their obeying the Mosaic Covenant, even if He has changed their inwardness by the work of His Holy Spirit, and even if they are performing animal sacrifices appropriately, as I believe the Bible is saying that they will during the millennial kingdom of Jesus. God's forgiveness of the Jews is always on the basis of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection, by which he qualified to be their high priest.

This actually was also the case during Old Testament times. True Jewish believers in Yahweh who brought their animal sacrifices to the tabernacle or temple did not obtain God's mercy because the animal's death, but on the basis of Jesus' future death. Moses was never wrong in his declaring to the Jews that they should offer animals to God in order to obtain His mercy. But he knew and meant all along, in spite of the Jews' moral obligation to follow the Mosaic Covenant down through history, that God, through another Jew, would do something greater than what Moses had done in mediating the Mosaic Covenant to the Jews, which is why he told the Israelites in Deuteronomy 18:15-22,

- Deuteronomy 18:15** Yahweh your God will raise up a prophet from among your midst, from your brothers like me. You shall listen to him,
- 18:16** according to all which you asked from Yahweh your God at Horeb in the day of the assembly, saying, Let me not hear again the voice of Yahweh my God. Let me not see anymore this great fire, or I will die.
- 18:17** Yahweh said to me, They have done well in what they have said.
- 18:18** I will raise up a prophet for them from among their brothers like you, and I will put My words in his mouth, and he will speak to them everything that I command him.
- 18:19** And it will come about that everyone who does not listen to My words, which he will speak in My name, I will seek from him.
- 18:20** Nevertheless, the prophet who acts presumptuously to speak a message in My name, which I did not command him to speak, which he speaks in the name of other gods, that prophet will die.
- 18:21** And if you say in your hearts, How do we know the message which Yahweh speaks?
- 18:22** That which the prophet speaks in the name of Yahweh, and the message is not, that is the message which Yahweh did not speak. The prophet has spoken it with pride. You shall not fear on the basis of him.

In the midst of restating the Mosaic Covenant in Deuteronomy around 1500 B.C., Moses informs the Israelites, who are poised on the eastern bank of the Jordan River, ready to cross it and take possession of the land of Canaan which God has promised them through Abraham in Genesis 12:1-3, that God spoke to him at Mt. Horeb forty years earlier to the effect that He will provide them with another leader like him. The implication, however, is that this future leader not only will speak God's truth as Moses has, but also will be greater than Moses and will provide the Jews with more than Moses can with the Mosaic Covenant. Thus it will be incumbent on them to watch carefully as other Jews attempt to be a spokesmen to them at the level of this final prophet and to wait for him only. But if this future leader is greater than Moses, then his leadership involves something greater than even the animal sacrifices prescribed by the Mosaic Covenant. Therefore, the offerings of animals in the tabernacle (and future temple) by even Jews with authentic belief never obtains God's mercy to the extent that they need in order to acquire all the promises God made to Abraham. Instead, it will be what this future, greater leader provides that does. As a result,

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Paul can say to the Jews and Gentiles in the Psidian Antioch synagogue, “all which you are not able to be justified by means of the instruction of Moses is being declared to you through this man,” the final prophet predicted by the Mosaic Covenant, Jesus the Messiah.

Paul ends his speech by warning his listeners in the synagogue not to follow in the footsteps of the Jews in Habakkuk’s day who ignored God’s warning around 610 B.C. of the impending destruction of the southern kingdom of Judah. Is Paul implying that there is still more earthly, divine judgment to come on the Jews who inhabit the land of Israel? Most likely, because he certainly would have been aware of Jesus’ prediction which we find, for example, in Matthew 24 of the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple. Many of the Jews and Gentiles in his audience are heeding the warning and believing Paul so that they urge him to return to the synagogue on the next Sabbath and continue the discussion. Paul agrees, but the following week there is a large group of Jews who are adamantly hostile to his message and argue publicly that he is wrong. Luke describes what these Jews are doing as “blaspheming,” because they are “contradicting the things spoken by Paul.” To blaspheme is to state confidently and unwaveringly that something is true when it is false. Paul is presenting solid, biblical truth to his listeners. The unbelieving Jews are presenting solid, unbiblical falsehood to the same audience. Consequently, Luke describes the Jews as “blaspheming,” whether they are consciously aware that they are contradicting their own Bible or they are confident that their interpretation of the Bible is true, while it obviously is false.

Paul’s response to these Jews is, first, to state that he had a moral obligation to present the message of Jesus to them before he presented it to the Gentiles—even though he is the appointed apostle to the Gentiles. On what basis is Paul saying this? It is that which we have been seeing in all the speeches we have been examining in Acts, that God has made certain promises to Abraham and his Jewish descendants that place them in a position of priority within human history. They are His chosen people whom He is using to reveal Himself and His purposes to all the rest of the nations on earth. In addition, Jesus is Jewish and, therefore, first and foremost the Messiah of the Jews, while also being the Messiah of the Gentiles. Certainly, in the final analysis, Jesus becomes the Messiah of Jews and Gentiles equally, because it is through him that they both acquire eternal life. But, as Paul says in Romans 1:14-17,

Romans 1:14 I am under obligation to both the Greeks and the barbarians, and to both the intelligent and the unintelligent. **1:15** Thus also my eagerness to proclaim the good news to you who are in Rome, **1:16** because I am not embarrassed by the good news. This is because it involves the power of God, resulting in rescue from eternal destruction for everyone who believes it—for the Jew first and also for the Greek. **1:17** Justification from God is being brought about because of it by means of a person’s belief for the sake of belief, just as it has been written,

But the one who is justified by belief shall live <Habakkuk 2:4>.

Secondly, because these Jews in Psidian Antioch are refusing to take advantage of their position of priority and believe in their own king and priest, Jesus of Nazareth, Paul indicts them for being unworthy of eternal life and warns them that he will now turn to the Gentiles as his main audience. Paul also quotes Isaiah 42:6 and 49:6 that God has intended that the

ideas regarding the Jewish Messiah be presented to the Gentiles so that Jesus' saviorship extend "to the end of the earth." Does this mean that God is turning away permanently from the Jews, so that the emphasis in history will be on Gentiles' becoming believers in Jesus for the sake of their eternal salvation? The evidence which Paul presented in his speech the week before in Psidian Antioch indicates not. Certainly, the story of Jesus' first coming and its benefit for all people, Jews and Gentiles, to gain eternal life as promised to Abraham is God's ultimate goal. However, He does not accomplish this without first granting forgiveness and life in the temporary Kingdom of Israel to Jews through Jesus' death and resurrection.⁵

Acts 10:34-11:26

The Gentiles are ecstatic that Paul will concentrate on teaching them about Jesus, while the Psidian Antioch Jews drive Paul and Barnabas out of their city, so that they move on to Iconium. However, we will continue our backward journey through Acts to chapters 10 and 11 where we find Peter visiting a Gentile's house in order to present his family with the news of Jesus' Messiahship. We will also consider how his fellow Jews initially and eventually responded to this important step by God. The passage of Acts 10:34-11:25 starts with Peter's speaking to Cornelius, the Roman centurion, and his family, and ends with Paul and Barnabas in Antioch where they teach Gentile Christians for a year,

Acts 10:34 Opening his mouth, Peter said,

On the basis of truth, I have reached the conclusion that God does not show favoritism. **10:35** Instead, the one who fears Him and performs righteousness in every nation is acceptable to Him. **10:36** He sent the message to the sons of Israel, proclaiming the good news of shalom by means of Jesus the Messiah. This one is Lord of all. **10:37** You know that which took place throughout all Judea, starting from Galilee, after the baptism which John proclaimed. **10:38** You know about Jesus from Nazareth, how God anointed him with the Spirit who is different and with authority. He went about performing good works and healing all those who were oppressed by the adversary, because God was with him. **10:39** And we are witnesses of all the things he did in the region of the Jews and Jerusalem, whom they also killed by hanging him on a cross. **10:40** God raised him on the third day and granted him to become visible, **10:41** not to all the people, but to witnesses who were chosen beforehand by God, namely us, who ate and drank with him after he arose from the dead. **10:42** And he commanded us to proclaim to the people and to bear witness solemnly that he is the one appointed by God to be the judge of the living and the dead. **10:43** All the prophets bear witness to him, that everyone who believes in him obtains forgiveness for their evil actions.

10:44 While Peter was still speaking these words, the Spirit who is different fell on all those who were listening to the message, **10:45** and the believers from the circumcision, as many as had come with Peter, were amazed, because the gift of the Spirit who is different had also been poured out on the

⁵ And, of course, God grants forgiveness to both resurrected and "raptured" Jews and Gentiles who participate in the earthly kingdom of Israel as immortal and morally perfect beings, like their king Jesus.

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Gentiles. 10:46 For they were hearing them speaking with languages and extolling God. Then, Peter responded,

10:47 Certainly no can withhold water from these so that they are not baptized, who have received the Spirit who is different just as we also did.

10:48 And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of Jesus the Messiah. Then, they asked them to stay with them for a few days. 11:1 The apostles and the brothers who were in Judea heard that, indeed, the Gentiles had embraced the message of God. 11:2 And when Peter came up to Jerusalem, those from the circumcision were at odds with him, 11:3 saying

You entered in with uncircumcised men and ate with them.

11:4 But Peter began explaining to them in an orderly fashion,

I was praying in the city of Joppa, and in a trance I saw a vision, a certain object coming down, like a large cloth, being let down from the sky by its four corners. And it came to me. 11:6 I observed it, looking steadfastly at it, and I saw four-footed animals of the earth, wild beasts, reptiles, and birds of the sky. 11:7 I also heard a voice saying to me,

Get up, Peter. Kill and eat.

11:8 But I said,

By no means, Lord, because nothing common or unclean has ever entered my mouth.

11:9 And the voice from heaven answered a second time,

The things which God has cleansed, you should not consider common.

11:10 And this happened three times, and everything was pulled up again into heaven. 11:11 Behold, immediately three men arrived at the house in which we were staying. They had been sent from Caesarea to me. 11:12 The Spirit told me to go with them without thinking twice. So, these six brothers went with me, and we entered into the man's house. 11:13 He reported to us how he had seen the angel standing in his house and saying,

Send to Joppa, and have Simon, who is also called Peter, brought here. 11:14 He will speak words to you, by which you will be saved, along with all your household.

11:15 As I began to speak, the Spirit who is different fell on them, just as He did on us at the beginning. 11:16 And I remembered the message of the Lord, when he said,

John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Spirit who is different.

11:17 Therefore, if God gave to them the same gift as He did to us who believe in the Lord Jesus the Messiah, who am I that I have the power to hinder God?

11:18 When they heard these things, they quieted down and glorified God, saying,

In which case, God has given repentance to the Gentiles for the purpose of life.

11:19 Then, those who were scattered because of the persecution that occurred in connection with Stephen, traveled to Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch, speaking the message to no one but Jews alone.

11:20 But there were some of them, men of Cyprus and Cyrene, who came to Antioch, speaking also to the Greeks and proclaiming the good news of the Lord Jesus. **11:21** The hand of Yahweh was with them, and a large number who believed turn to Yahweh. **11:22** And the story was heard in the ears of the assembly in Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch.

11:23 When he arrived and saw the grace of God, he rejoiced and encouraged them all to remain resolute in heart with respect to the Lord, **11:24** because he was a good man and full of the Spirit who is different and of belief. And a great crowd were added to the Lord. **11:25** He then left for Tarsus to look for Saul, **11:26** and, when he found him, he brought him to Antioch. It then happened that they brought them together in an assembly for a whole year and taught the large crowd. And the students were first called Christians in Antioch.

Peter begins his explanation to these Gentiles by stating that he is convinced that God does not prefer Jews over Gentiles to be His people. This sounds contradictory to the whole notion that the Jews are God's chosen people, and we will come back to it in a moment when we look at Peter's defense to his fellow Jewish Christians for why he visited Cornelius. Peter describes the kind of human being who is acceptable to God as someone who "fears Him and performs righteousness in every nation." We have already seen in Acts 15 that the apostles decide that the performing of righteousness for Gentiles does not include obeying the Mosaic Covenant. Instead, it involves belief in Jesus as the Messiah and avoiding the immoral behavior that is typical among unbelievers. This, then, is how a Gentile mimics Abraham's faith and, along with him, becomes blessed with eternal life according to God's promise in Genesis 12:3, "And in you [Abraham] all the families of the ground will be blessed."

Peter also comments that God sent this message of belief and morality first to the Jews, that by means of Jesus of Nazareth a person acquires shalom, God's mercy and the promise of living well eventually in the eternal Kingdom of God. The Jews were also the first to hear that Jesus is everybody's Lord. He is the future ruler of both Jews and Gentiles. Paul also assumes that Cornelius and his family have heard about Jesus and his miracles, explaining that he performed them because God had "anointed him with the Spirit who is different." The Greek word for anoint is basically the same as that for Christ. Consequently, Peter is claiming that the transcendent Creator was working within the creation through His Spirit to make Jesus the final Christ and Messiah, because Messiah is the English form of the Hebrew *Maschiach*, which also means anointed.

Peter then relates Jesus' experience of death by crucifixion and resurrection by God, culminating in his appearing, eating, and drinking with those who had witnessed all this. As a result, Peter and the rest of the apostles, along with Jesus' other disciples and students, received explicit instructions from Jesus to announce to the Jews that he is the means to either death or life by virtue of his being God's judge of everyone, either who is currently living or who has already died, i.e., living or dead at the time Jesus returns and establishes his millennial kingdom which will also result in the final judgment of all human beings before

God (cf. 1 Thessalonians 4; Revelation 20; 1 Corinthians 15). Peter ends his speech by referencing the Old Testament prophets, to the effect that they spoke of the Messiah and his being the means to God's forgiveness (cf. Isaiah 53).

And then the truly remarkable happens. Cornelius and his family begin speaking in languages previously unknown to them, and the content of their words is about God and His majesty. Peter immediately recognizes that God is acting towards these Gentiles in the same manner that He had towards the Jews in Acts 2, which is coming later in our backward study of Acts. He says specifically that Cornelius' family "have received the Spirit who is different *just as we also did* (emphasis mine)." Certainly, now God has doubly confirmed for Peter that He "does not show favoritism" (cf. v. 34). If God causes Gentile believers to speak in unknown foreign languages just as he caused Jesus' Jewish apostles and disciples to do so, then what difference, spiritually speaking, is there between Gentile believers outside the nation of Israel, God's chosen people in history, and Jewish believers, members of the physical descendants of Abraham, who are obligated within history to follow the Mosaic Covenant in order to demonstrate their obedience to God to the rest of the world? None, zippo, nada, nyet!!! Through belief in the Jewish Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth, both Jews and Gentiles receive God's fulfillment of the Abrahamic promises—as those who have the right to live on the land of Israel under Jesus' monarchical government as either mortal Jews or immortal Jews and Gentiles, *and* as those who have the right to live in the eternal Kingdom of God under his reign as immortal Jews and Gentiles.

Cornelius and his believing family are then baptized in water, and Peter and his Jewish associates stay with them for a few days before heading back to Jerusalem. However, when they do reach Jerusalem, some of the believing Jews are upset with them for what they consider to be a violation of the Mosaic Covenant. Peter and his Jewish associates have entered a Gentile's house and actually stayed with him and his family—in apparent violation of the Mosaic Covenant, because they have eaten food prepared by Gentiles, food which is most likely not kosher, and associated with people who are also eating this food that is not kosher, making all these people unclean with respect to the covenant. This is what Peter means when he says in a previous verse,

Acts 10:28 And he said to them [Cornelius' Gentile family and friends],

You know how unlawful it is for a Jewish man to become intimately involved with or come to a foreigner. But God has shown me not to call any man common or unclean.

It sounds as though Peter is saying that it is a violation of the Mosaic Covenant if he is even in the presence of a Gentile, or at least in his house with him. But this cannot be what he means, because when the Gentiles, two household slaves and a soldier, who were sent by Cornelius to Joppa to find him, Peter invited them into the house where he was staying and provided them with food and lodging, as verse 23 states,

Acts 10:23 Therefore, he invited them in and gave them lodging. And on the next day, he rose up and went with them [to Cornelius' house]. And some of the brothers from Joppa went with him.

Consequently, the objection of the Jews in Jerusalem is that Peter and his six fellow Jewish believers partook of food which they was most likely not kosher, because it was prepared by the Gentile Cornelius and his family, thus disobeying God's explicit instructions in the Mosaic Covenant. So Peter lays out the whole story for them. First, he was in Joppa near the modern city of Tel Aviv in Israel. He was praying to God and fell into a trance, where he saw a large cloth descending from heaven with all sorts of creatures on it. God commands him to kill the creatures and eat them, but they are clearly animals listed in the Mosaic Covenant that are forbidden for Jews to eat. Peter refuses God's command, because he does not want to violate the Mosaic Covenant. God responds that it is now ok to do so, because He has declared these animals no longer unclean but clean. And the scene and the conversation repeat twice more.

Immediately afterwards, three men arrive at the house in Joppa from Cornelius who lives in Caesarea Maritima up the coast, and God, either with just the dream or with it and additional words to Peter, communicates to him that he should accompany these men to Cornelius' house. So Peter and his six Jewish traveling companions do so. Cornelius welcomes them, explains to Peter that God had directed him to send his three men to him at Joppa to invite him to his house, and Peter begins talking.

The next thing Peter knows, as he is explaining to the Jews in Jerusalem, God causes these Gentiles to do exactly what He had caused the Jewish apostles and disciples to do on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2—speak about God's magnificence using languages previously unknown to them. Peter tells his Jerusalem audience that this reminded him of Jesus' words regarding God's baptizing people with His Spirit in contrast to John the Baptists' baptizing with water. Thus, Peter ends his explanation and argument for the appropriateness of his fraternizing with Gentiles and eating food that is not kosher by stating that clearly God gifted the Gentiles with the same experience of languages and great thoughts about God as He gifted the Jews, even the Jewish apostles. Consequently, if the transcendent Creator is doing this, why should Peter (or any other Mosaic Covenant obeying Jew) try to stop Him? Obviously, he should not. And his Jewish audience in Jerusalem agree, quiet down, and conclude that God is granting repentance and life to the Gentiles just as much as He is to the Jews. In the light of this fact, they also should acknowledge that eating food with believing Gentiles and which is not kosher because it is outside the explicit boundaries of the Mosaic Covenant renders neither the Gentiles nor Jews unclean. In the light of God's acceptance of Gentiles who have genuine belief in Jesus as the Messiah, their belief transcends the historical obligations of Jews to obey the Mosaic Covenant, so that Jews can join the Gentiles in the food that they eat, which is in apparent violation of the covenant. As a result, Jews demonstrate that they acknowledge the equality in status before God of authentically believing Gentiles who have no obligation to the Mosaic Covenant.

Later in this same passage, Jews take the message of Jesus as the Messiah to only their fellow Jews in Phoenicia (Lebanon), the island of Cyprus, and Antioch on the Orontes (near the coast of Syria). But Gentiles in Antioch hear and believe the message, so that Peter and other leaders in Jerusalem send Barnabas to investigate. Barnabas becomes so excited about God's display of His grace among the Antiochene Gentiles that he travels a short distance west to Tarsus and brings Paul back with him. These two Jewish theologians of Jesus the Messiah go on to teach the Gentiles for a whole year, which, of course, is exactly what Jesus

told Paul is his responsibility as the apostle to the Gentiles (cf. Acts 24,26). And it is in Antioch where believers in Jesus are first called Christians.

There are a number of things we glean from this story for our purposes of understanding God and His relationship to the Jews and His relationship to the Gentiles. First, originally, even the apostles understood the Mosaic Covenant in such a way that they considered it immoral to associate so closely with Gentiles that they eat food that is not kosher. Therefore, Peter needed his theology changed, so that it would be clear to him that the Mosaic Covenant's prohibition against being in close proximity to Gentiles so as to partake of food which is not kosher has nothing to do with communicating the most important ideas in the world to Gentiles. When it comes to the Jewish Messiah, Jews are supposed to proclaim him to themselves and to everybody else, regardless of the social circumstances in which this places them. But a question is, did this new understanding for Peter also change his perspective on the Mosaic Covenant so that, 1) he believes that Jews no longer need to obey it, or 2) he believes that God is no longer interested in fulfilling His promises to the Jews of giving them the land of Israel and descendants, while also eventually making them a "great nation," or 3) he believes both #1 and #2? Our study of Joel and other passages is leading us towards none of these as being correct. Thus, Peter is still an Abrahamic Covenant & Mosaic Covenant believing Jew who is expecting God to use Jesus to rule Israel on the land of Israel and to rule both Jews and Gentiles in the eternal Kingdom of God in heaven. However, he now understands also that his relationship with Gentile believers in the Jewish Messiah transcends his obligation to the religious and ceremonial commandments of the Mosaic Covenant, to the effect that the former trumps the latter when necessary—without affecting his relationship with God as a good, Bible believing, Mosaic Covenant following Jew.

The second thing that we glean from this story is that there is an actual sharing of the Jewish Messiah by Jews and Gentiles. Yes, Jesus is Jewish, but he is not so Jewish that he cannot be the king, judge, and means of divine forgiveness for Gentiles. Indeed, he is just as much these for non-Jews as he is for Jews. But does this mean that God has set aside His promises to the Jews, so that making them a great nation on the land of Israel according to Genesis 12:1-3 is no longer part of His plans and purposes? It might seem so, but we are seeing in Acts, and certainly in Joel, Jeremiah, and Revelation that this is not the case. The Jewish Messiah will be the king of the Jews when they become a "great nation" on earth, and he will be the king of all authentic believers in eternity in the new creation.

The third thing we glean from the story is that the prophets of the Old Testament wrote in a detailed and correct enough manner that a student of them could see clearly the correspondence between their writings and Jesus' life, death, and resurrection for the purpose of his becoming the judge and advocate of human beings, the latter however being for only authentic believers. Indeed, we have been learning over and over again that the apostles used the Old Testament as their basis for understanding Jesus, and not the other way around. The Old Testament was their adequate and accurate source of ideas for explaining the life, death, resurrection, and future kingship of Jesus. We have also seen in Joel and Jeremiah that Jesus' advocacy was so that mortal Jews with divinely changed inwardness could live on the land of Israel with his ruling over them from Jerusalem and so that Jews and Gentiles with changed inwardness could gain entrance into eternal life, which some will begin when Jesus returns and they are resurrected or immediately changed into immortal, morally perfect beings.

The fourth thing we glean from this story is that the ultimate requirement and mark of either a Jew who has the right to inhabit the earthly kingdom of Israel or the heavenly kingdom, or a Gentile who has the right to inhabit the heavenly kingdom is exactly the same—God’s pouring out His Spirit on the person, i.e., God’s changing the person’s inwardness so that he performs and demonstrates genuine, biblical belief in Jesus as the Messiah. In other words, this requirement and mark is the same for both a Jew and a Gentile and does not involve *per se* obedience to the Mosaic Covenant. Therefore, Peter as an apostle can observe a Jew speaking about the mighty things of God in a foreign language, without knowing anything of how well this Jew has been practicing the Mosaic Covenant, and tell that he is a person who can live on the land of Israel under Jesus’ kingship and gain eternal life. And now Peter knows that this telltale sign of the Jew’s being qualified for these two kingdoms is exactly the same as that of the Gentile’s being qualified for the second of the two kingdoms, i.e., the eternal one.

Therefore, a Jew can be doing an absolutely lousy job of obeying the Mosaic Covenant, even completely ignoring it, but if he all of a sudden genuinely believes that Jesus is his Messiah, king, judge, and advocate in order to obtain God’s eternal mercy, then he is acceptable to God. In the same way, a Gentile can be doing an absolutely lousy job of acknowledging that there is a God, but if he, too, all of a sudden genuinely believes that Jesus is his Messiah, king, judge, and advocate in order to obtain God’s eternal mercy, then he is just as acceptable to God as the believing Jew. And together they will live in the eternal Kingdom of God, starting with mortal and immortal Jews inhabiting the land of Israel and immortal Gentiles inhabiting this same land as a result of Jesus’ second coming.⁶

Acts 5:12-33

This now takes us back one more relevant passage in Acts to another important event in Jerusalem. The apostles are arrested and put in prison by the high priest and his associates. An angel of God releases the apostles from prison, and they return to the temple to proclaim the message of Jesus as the Messiah. Eventually, the entire Jewish council, the Sanhedrin, have them arrested again and brought before them. It is the apostles’ response to the Sanhedrin to which we now want to give our attention, but here is the whole story of Acts 5:12-33,

Acts 5:12 By means of the hands of the apostles, many signs and affirming miracles were occurring among the people. And they were all of one accord in Solomon’s porch. **5:13** And none of the rest dared to join them. Nevertheless, the people spoke highly of them. **5:14** Plus, more of those who believed in the Lord were added to them, multitudes of men and women, **5:15** so that they also carried the sick into the streets and laid them on cots and pallets, in order that when Peter came, even his shadow could fall on any of them. **5:16** And the multitude from the cities surrounding Jerusalem were coming together, bringing the sick and those afflicted by unclean spirits.

⁶ This is what we have found from the compilation of the ideas presented in 1 Thessalonians 4, Revelation 20, and 1 Corinthians 15 above.

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5:17 And the high priest rose up, and all those who were with him (that is, the faction of the Pharisees), and they were filled with strong aggression. 5:18 Then, they laid hands on the apostles and put them in public prison. 5:19 But, during the night, an angel of the Lord opened the doors of the prison, and leading them out, he said to them,

5:20 Go, stand, and speak to the people in the temple all the words of this life.

5:21 After hearing this, they entered into the temple at dawn, and they were teaching. When the high priest and those who were with him appeared, they called together the Sanhedrin and all the council of the sons of Israel. And they sent to the prison for them to be brought. 5:22 But the officers who came did not find them in the prison. Instead, they returned and reported back,

5:23 We found the prison locked very securely and the guards standing at the doors. But when we opened them, we found no one inside.

5:24 When the captain of the temple and the chief priests heard this, they doubted them as to what had happened. 5:25 But someone came and reported to them,

Behold, the men whom you put in prison are in the temple, standing and teaching the people.

5:26 Then, the captain went with the officers, and they brought them, but without violence, because they were afraid of the people, that they might be stoned. 5:27 And when they brought them, they stood them in the Sanhedrin. And the high priest questioned them,

5:28 Did we not command you absolutely not to teach in this name? But, behold, you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching, and you want to bring down on us the blood of this man.

5:29 But Peter and the apostles answered,

We must obey God rather than men. 5:30 The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom you killed by hanging him on a cross. 5:31 God lifted up this man as ruler and savior to His right hand to grant repentance and forgiveness of immoral actions to Israel. 5:32 And we are witnesses of these matters, along with the Spirit who is different, whom God has given to those who obey Him.

5:33 And when they heard this, they became furious and planned to kill them.

In v. 28, the high priest asks the apostles why they are disobeying the Sanhedrin's last order for them to refrain from speaking about Jesus in public. The apostles begin their response in v. 29 with the simple fact that God is their leader and not the human Sanhedrin in Jerusalem. They are implying that God has commanded them to be authoritative spokesmen in public of the news of Jesus' death, resurrection, and movement to a position of authority and ruling over the creation by being at God's right hand.

The apostles also refer to the "God of our fathers" as the one who has raised Jesus from the dead and granted him his position of being the ruler of the creation within the creation. This phrase in reference to God means that He is the God of the Jews, going all the way back to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Of all the Semitic people living in the Middle East

around 2000 B.C., it was Abraham whom God chose to be the first Jew, from whom the rest of the Jewish people would come.

The apostles then refer to the resurrected Jesus as “ruler and savior.” The question is, ruler of what/whom and savior of whom? The apostles answer this question in this context by restating what Jesus’ purpose is. It is “to grant repentance and forgiveness of immoral actions to Israel.” But our question since the beginning of this addendum has been, When the apostles refer to Jesus’ relationship to Israel, do they believe that God will first fulfill His promises to the Jews and set up a Davidic kingdom on the land of Israel, while they also perform the 613 commandments of the Mosaic Covenant on the land and in a temple, and then God will fulfill His promise to both believing Jews and Gentiles and grant them life in the future eternal Kingdom of God? Or is only the latter promise still in effect? Except for the fact that the apostles name only “Israel” as the object of forgiveness, their response to the Sanhedrin does not provide us with any more details to say one way or the other. However, the evidence so far in Joel, Revelation, and the rest of Acts is leading in the direction that both the Jewish promises on the land of Israel and the Jewish/Gentile promises in eternal life are in the apostles’ minds. As a result, the Old Testament accurately and adequately states the promises which God will fulfill, while the New Testament confirms that this is the case through Jesus the Messiah.

Acts 4:1-30

This brings us to the previous time that Peter, along with John, stood before the Sanhedrin, and the Jewish leadership had commanded them not to speak of Jesus in public. The story of Acts 4:1-30 reads,

Acts 4:1 As they were speaking to the people, the priests, the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees came up to them. **4:2** They were greatly annoyed because of their teaching the people and proclaiming the resurrection from the dead by means of Jesus. **4:3** And they laid hands on them and put them in jail until the next day, because it was already evening. **4:4** But many of those who heard the message believed, and the number of the men was five thousand.

4:5 It happened the next day that they gathered together—the rulers, elders, and scribes in Jerusalem, **4:6** along with Annas the high priest, Caiaphas, John, Alexander, and as many as were from the high-priestly family. **4:7** When they had stood them in their midst, they inquired,

By means of what power or in what name did you do this?

4:8 Then Peter, filled with the Spirit who is different, said to them,

Rulers and elders of the people, **4:9** if we today are being examined for an act of kindness towards an unhealthy man, that is, by means of what has this man been healed, **4:10** let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel that in the name of Jesus the Messiah of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead, by means of this man he stands before you well. **4:11** He is the stone which was disdained by you the builders, which became the chief cornerstone <Psalm 118:22>. **4:12** Plus, by means of nothing else is there

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salvation, for there is no other name which has been given under heaven among men by which we must be saved.

4:13 When they observed Peter's and John's boldness and grasped the fact that they were uneducated and unlearned men, they were amazed, and they recognized that they had been with Jesus. 4:14 Seeing the man who had been healed standing with them, they had nothing to say in response. 4:15 Then, having commanded them to go outside the Sanhedrin, they were conferring with one another, 4:16 saying,

What should we do with these men? It is apparent to everyone who lives in Jerusalem that an obvious miracle has occurred through them, and we cannot deny it. 4:17 But in order that it might not spread any further among the people, let us warn them to speak no more in this name to anyone.

4:18 And having called them, they commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. 4:19 But Peter and John answered and said to them,

If it is right before God to listen to you rather than to God, you judge. 4:20 For we cannot not speak about the things we have seen and heard.

4:21 After threatening them further, they released them (finding no basis on which to punish them), on account of the people, because they were glorifying God because of what had happened, 4:22 for the man towards whom this sign of healing had taken place was more than forty years old.

4:23 And after being released they went to their own people and reported the things which the high priests and elders had said to them. 4:24 And when they heard, they lifted up their voices to God with one accord and said,

Lord, You, the One who has made heaven, earth, the sea, and everything that is in them <Exodus 20:11>, 4:25 who, through the Spirit who is different, by the mouth of our father David, Your servant, said,

Why are the nations insolent, and why do the peoples ponder futile things?

4:26 The kings of the earth take their stand, and the rulers have gathered together for the same purpose, against Yahweh and against His Anointed One <Psalm 2:1-2>.

4:27 For in truth there were gathered together in this city against Your servant who is different, Jesus, whom You anointed, Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel 4:28 to do as much as Your hand and Your plan predetermined to occur. 4:29 And now, Yahweh, take note of their threats and grant that Your bondslaves speak Your message with all boldness, 4:30 by Your stretching out Your hand for the purpose of healing, signs, and warning signs occurring by the name of Your servant who is different, Jesus.

Peter and John have healed a lame man and spoken of Jesus to the amazed crowd around him. Next thing they know they are being arrested by the Jewish leadership. The Jews are particularly upset that Peter and John are claiming that people can rise from the dead by means of Jesus. Are they saying the same thing as what we have seen Peter and Paul refer to

as God's using Jesus to fulfill His promises to Israel? Yes, because we have seen that it means that the apostles are connecting God's earthly promises to the Jews with His eternal promises to the Jews and Gentiles. Here, Peter and John are emphasizing God's promise of eternal life to the Jews and that this occurs by God's using Jesus to bring this about. They do not provide the details of how God uses Jesus, but they must mean that he acquires mercy and forgiveness for them. In effect, they are also claiming that Jesus will become the Jews' king when God transforms them into the greatest nation in history.

What is so upsetting about all this to the Sanhedrin? Is it the difference in theology between them and the apostles? While the Jewish leadership place most of the hope of Israel on obeying the Mosaic Covenant, are they upset that the apostles are placing all the hope of Israel on Jesus and belief in him? In other words, are the rulers of the Jews upset that the Messiah is being given such a prominent role by the apostles, which diminishes the role of the Mosaic Covenant? Yes and no. Because the Jews in those days misunderstood the Old Testament's teaching that the Messiah must suffer (cf. Acts 17), they would be upset that the apostles are giving the Messiah a much more prominent role in the nation of Israel than the Mosaic Covenant. But even if the Jewish leaders understood this important aspect of Old Testament theology, they would still be upset with the apostles. While the message of Jesus agrees with that of the Old Testament that the animal sacrifices are inadequate to gain God's mercy, so that he is the necessary means to doing so, it is more that the apostles are declaring that a man who was executed as a criminal by the Jewish leadership is their Messiah. It is not shifting the emphasis *per se* from the Mosaic Covenant to the Messiah that bothers the rulers. It is shifting the emphasis to an executed criminal that sounds outrageous to them. This comes out explicitly in the passage we previously examined when these same leaders complain to the apostles, "You have filled Jerusalem with your teachings, and you want to bring down on us the blood of this man" (cf. Acts 5:28). They cannot stand the fact that they are being accused of murdering the long-awaited Messiah of the Old Testament.

The next day the Sanhedrin meet and question Peter and John about their source of authority for performing such a miracle and making nonsensical statements that God's mercy and resurrection from the dead is dependent on the criminal Jesus of Nazareth. Peter responds politely that he knows that he is addressing the leadership of his own people, the Jews. These men are supposedly the most learned and educated Jews of their day. Therefore, because of their study of the Old Testament, they should have the best grasp on God's plans and purposes for the nation of Israel and the rest of the world. However, clearly they have misunderstood the same Old Testament passages which Paul will use later in Acts to explain that it was necessary for the Messiah to suffer. As a result, they do not acknowledge and embrace Jesus of Nazareth as their king and God's priestly and sacrificial instrument of mercy. Therefore, Peter states plainly that it is "in the name of Jesus the Messiah of Nazareth" that John and he performed the loving act of healing the lame man, and he wants all of Israel, all the Jews, to recognize this. Thus, as we would expect from examining the previous passages of Acts, Peter's statements are very Jewish-centric.

Peter also refers to what happened to Jesus that, he is implying, resulted in his acquiring the role of king and judicial mediator for people before God. It was the Jewish leadership's executing Jesus on a cross, so that God raised him from the dead, that also permits Jesus to be the means by which they have healed the lame man. Peter explicitly comments that "we,"

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i.e., his fellow Jews and he, cannot obtain escape from God's condemnation for their immorality by means of any other person (including a Levitical priest who performs an animal sacrifice for them). It is Jesus, or no one, who delivers them from divine judgment and destruction.

Peter uses a quote from Psalm 118 to bolster his argument about Jesus's role in the history of Israel and the current Jewish leadership's mistreatment of him by refusing to accept him as their Messiah and advocate before God. In order to understand Peter's use of this quote, we need to consider the entire Psalm and put the quote in its proper context. Thus, Psalm 118 reads,

Psalm 118:1 Admit [pl.] to Yahweh that He is good, because His loyal love is into perpetuity.

118:2 Let Israel say, His loyal love is into perpetuity.

118:3 Let the house of Aaron say, His loyal love is into perpetuity.

118:4 Let those who fear Yahweh say, His loyal love is into perpetuity.

118:5 From a stressful situation I called out to Yah. Yah answered in a big place.

118:6 Yahweh is for me. I will not fear. What can *adam* do to me?

118:7 Yahweh is for me. He is among those who are helping me. As for me, I will look on those who hate me.

118:8 It is better to take refuge in Yahweh than to trust in *adam*.

118:9 It is better to take refuge in Yahweh than to trust in those in high society.

118:10 All the *goyeem* have surrounded me. In the name of Yahweh I will surely cut them off.

118:11 They surrounded me. Yes, they surrounded me. In the name of Yahweh I will surely cut them off.

118:12 They surrounded me like bees. They were put out like a fire of thorns. In the name of Yahweh I will surely cut them off.

118:13 You pushed me violently so that I fell, but Yahweh helped me.

118:14 Yah is my refuge and strength. He has become *yeshua* for me.

118:15 The sound of joyful shouting and *yeshua* is in the tents of the righteous [*tzadeekeem*].

118:16 The right hand of Yahweh is being exalted. The right hand of Yahweh operates competently.

118:17 I will not die, but I will live. And I will proclaim the actions of Yah.

118:18 Yah has instructed me diligently, but He has not given me up to death.

118:19 Open the gates of righteousness [*tzadek*] for me. I acknowledge Yah.

118:20 This is the gate to Yahweh. The righteous [*tzadeekeem*] enter by means of it.

118:21 I acknowledge You, because You answered me. And You have become for me *yeshua*.

118:22 The builders rejected the stone. It is the cornerstone (רֹשׁ פִּנְנָה, *rosh pinnah*) (κεφαλὴν γωνίας).

118:23 This is from Yahweh. It is wonderful in our eyes.

118:24 This is the day that Yahweh has made. Let us rejoice and delight in it.

118:25 Please, Yahweh, save (הוֹשִׁיעֵנוּ, *hosheey'ah*)! Please, please, Yahweh, cause success! Please!

118:26 Blessed is that which [he who?] comes in the name of Yahweh. We have blessed You [pl.] from the house of Yahweh.

118:27 Yahweh is God, and He has caused there to be light for us. Bind the feast with ropes to the horns of the altar.

118:28 You are my God, and I acknowledge You. I lift You up high.

118:29 Admit [pl.] to Yahweh that He is good, because His loyal love is into perpetuity.

It is important to recognize in this Psalm that sometimes the individual author is talking about only his own situation, and sometimes he is addressing a crowd. Thus, in v. 5 the author states, “From a stressful situation I called to Yah [short for Yahweh],” while in v. 1 he exhorts all his readers, “Admit [pl.] to Yahweh that He is good.” In addition, we do not know who the author is and when he lived. We also do not know if he recently was in a “stressful situation,” or if his experience of God’s rescuing him from one was in the distant past, or if God has been doing so consistently throughout his life. In any case, he is certainly mentioning God’s salvation (*yeshua*) as part of what it means for him to have the kind of relationship with God that he has.

The fact that this is a Psalm, it makes sense to assume that the author is Jewish, and he is addressing his fellow Jews, the nation of Israel. Consequently, in the first four verses, he exhorts the Jews, including the Levitical priests who serve God in the temple, all of whom he assumes are genuine worshipers of God (“those who fear Yahweh”), to declare unequivocally that they know that God’s faithfulness to His promises to the Jews and His love for them are “into perpetuity.” First, God’s faithfulness and love are both contained in the one word **חֶסֶד** (*chesed*), which I have translated loyal love. It is the word which God constantly uses in the Old Testament to refer to His willingness to follow through on providing land, descendants, greatness as a nation, and eternal life to Abraham’s descendants (cf. Genesis 12:1-3; 24:27; Exodus 15:13, etc.). As we are finding out from the prophets and Revelation, this loving faithfulness of God is in spite of the Jews’ poor and immoral behavior, in other words, in spite of their deserving the exact opposite, both His temporary and eternal condemnation. Plus, we are finding out from Acts that God’s loyal love is in spite of the Jews’ rejecting and executing their own Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth. God is so faithful to His promises that even this latter form of rebellion against Him will not stop Him from eventually granting them authentic belief and transforming them into a “great nation.”

Second, the Psalmist uses an expression of time as to how long God’s faithfulness and love will last for the Jews—**לְעוֹלָם** (*le’olam*). This phrase is usually translated everlasting or forever, both which can lead the reader to think that something is permanent, even possibly to the extent that it is eternal. Thus, in this case, the inference can be that God’s *chesed* towards Israel and the Jews is eternal. However, if we consider that the rest of the Bible indicates that the present realm will eventually come to an end, then it makes sense to see as our options for interpreting *le’olam* in this Psalm as –

1. For a long time in the present realm, but not necessarily until its end
2. For the entirety of the present realm, right up to the end
3. For both the entirety of the present realm and into the eternal realm, thus eternally

Consequently, there is the possibility that God intends his *chesed* towards Israel and the Jews to last for only a finite period of time in the present realm, either until some important event or until the end of the present realm. Or it could last into eternity. For example, God could have made His promises to the Jews dependent on their accepting Jesus as the Messiah, so that, when they rejected Jesus at his first appearance, He abandoned them completely and

decided never to fulfill His promises to them. As a result, His *chesed* towards Israel lasted for a finite period of time—until they rejected Jesus. Or He could have made His promises dependent on the existence of the present realm, regardless of the Jews’ behavior, including their acceptance or rejection of Jesus two thousand years ago. As a result, His *chesed* towards Israel will last until He destroys the present realm and creates a new one, and it will involve His changing their hearts when they live on the land of Israel in Jesus’ millennial kingdom. Or He could have made His promises dependent on simply His sovereign choice eventually to turn them into a great nation and kingdom, which would include His changing them inwardly, while also granting them life in the next and eternal realm, which also comes from a circumcised heart. Therefore, this third option for His *chesed* towards Israel involves His changing the hearts of specific Jews in the present realm, especially the hearts of an entire generation at the second coming of Jesus as the Messiah, and welcoming each changed-heart Jew in history into the eternal Kingdom of God in the next creation, just as He welcomes each changed-heart Gentile into this same kingdom.

What does *le’olam* mean in Psalm 118? Verses 5-17 help us answer this question. In them, the author of the psalm describes a situation where Gentiles (*goyeem*) are coming after him to kill him. Yet, he is convinced that God will rescue him, and he will live. The word that he uses for deliverance and salvation is the Hebrew *yeshua*, the same word that Jews today, who are believers in Jesus as the Messiah, use as his name. Indeed, while Jesus is more a transliteration of the Greek word Ἰησοῦς (*iaysoos*), it is also an approximate transliteration of *yeshua*, which literally means salvation. In the psalmist’s case, he is saying that Yahweh, the transcendent Creator, is his *yeshua* and *iaysoos*, his “Jesus” so to speak and deliverance from physical death that his enemies, the Gentiles, want to carry out towards him. But he says that God will deliver him by His “right hand,” which is simply a reference to His power, strength, and whatever means that He uses at the moment to rescue His people from harm. Thus, we know that *le’olam* means at least while there are Jews who are being threatened by their Gentile enemies within the present realm. Otherwise, it would not make any sense for the psalmist to exhort his fellow Jews to praise God for his loyal love towards them.

In vs. 18-22, the author repeats some of the above ideas and adds a few others. First, he implies that *yeshua* from God comes to those who are the “righteous,” the *tzadeekeem*, and he includes himself in this group. Second, he defines the *tzadeekeem* by implying that they are not the “builders” who “rejected the stone,” that is “the cornerstone.” To whom and what is the psalmist referring? In the context of this psalm, the “whom” are those in vs. 8,9 who trust in *adam* and in people of high society to save them from their Gentile enemies. While human beings appear to be able to help the psalmist and his fellow Jews in rescuing them from their enemies, they are not. The psalmist is saying that only God can deliver them from death and keep them alive. Nevertheless, he is implying that he observes others in the nation of Israel who have not placed their trust completely in God but are trusting in human beings instead. They are like construction workers who know what ought to be the cornerstone of the foundation of the building under construction, but they reject it and choose another one with which to build their “deliverance from their enemies.” And what is the cornerstone in Psalm 118? God and His *chesed*, His loyal love and faithfulness to His promises to rescue His people from their Gentile enemies.⁷ Thus, we see that the psalmist is not referring to any

⁷ Cf. Isaiah 28:16 and Zechariah 10:4

particular building. He is using cornerstone and its associated building as a metaphor for the most important idea which he is presenting in this psalm along with its consequent results. The most important idea is God's *chesed* and loyal love which lasts as long as there are Jews, and the consequent results are God's providing *yeshua* to the Jewish people and rescuing them from their Gentile enemies.

In vs. 23-25, the author appeals to God for rescue from death, extols God for His being His salvation, and expresses how wonderful all this is. Verse 26 is somewhat difficult. Is the psalmist talking about a person ("he") who comes in the name of Yahweh, or an act ("that") which does? In the context, it is "that which," i.e., the deliverance, the *yeshua*, which has come from God to the author and that results in his salvation from physical death.⁸ As a result, the psalmist adds that all the Jews, "we," have blessed You (which is plural, i.e., the royal plural of God as King) from the temple, the house of Yahweh. The Jews have blessed God from the location of His connection with them, the temple, which is the appropriate thing to do according to the Mosaic Covenant. In vs. 27-29, the author ends by stating that God has brought the light of His knowledge and salvation to the Jews, which in this context is His loyal love and promises to Abraham to give them land, descendants, and the status of a great nation, so that they should worship Him with sacrifices in the manner in which He has commanded in the Mosaic Covenant. And he once more claims for himself that God is his God and then exhorts his fellow Jews to grab on to the fact that God's *chesed* is for at least as long as Jews exist (*le'olam*).

While it is possible that the psalmist is of the opinion that God's *chesed* is dependent upon the Jews' genuine belief and worship of God, nevertheless, he is implying that, as long as there are believing Jews, then God's *chesed* towards them will occur. Therefore, *le'olam* must mean at least until the end of the present realm, because we know from the prophets and Revelation that believing Jews will exist through the time of the Messiah's millennial kingdom. For our purposes of understanding Peter's quote of Psalm 118:22 in his speech in Acts 4:11, we have also seen that the author of this psalm is not referring to an actual building, e.g., the temple, the king's palace, a Jewish citizen's house, etc. He is using the idea of construction workers who build an edifice as a metaphor for certain Jews' distrust of God in the midst of their being threatened by Gentile enemies who want to kill them. Rather than trust the cornerstone, God and His loyal love, the Jews are rejecting Him and trusting human beings to deliver them from their enemies. Similarly, Peter is pointing to the hearts and unbelief of the Jews within the Sanhedrin who are listening to him. Peter is saying that the building that constitutes their own salvation from God and includes resurrection from the dead has the wrong cornerstone. Rather than trusting God, who has provided the Messiah as their means to His mercy and eternal deliverance from His condemnation, they are trusting themselves just as the psalmist spoke of certain Jews who trusted in *adam*, i.e., human beings.

⁸ When the Jews welcome Jesus on Palm Sunday as he rides into Jerusalem on a donkey, they quote this verse and obviously mean "he who," not "that which." While the psalmist means *the thing* of God's powerfully rescuing him from his Gentile enemies, the Jews on Palm Sunday take this meaning and demonstrate the significance of it with respect to the Messiah, whom they believe will rescue them from their enemies. However, they should also believe that he will rescue them from God's eternal condemnation, even though it is not clear in the passages that they do believe this (cf. Matthew 21:9; 23:39; Mark 11:9; Luke 13:35; John 12:13).

Indeed, the Jews of Peter's audience must be depending on their own obedience to the Mosaic Covenant, so that they are overlooking the concept in the Hebrew scriptures regarding the Messiah as the very means to God's mercy in place of the animal sacrifices of the Mosaic Covenant. Peter puts it plainly in 4:12 that nothing except the Messiah, not even the Mosaic Covenant, contains the required effectiveness to rescue people from God's condemnation. We should also find it interesting that Peter does not say that the Mosaic Covenant is no longer relevant to the nation of Israel now that the Messiah has come. This is not conclusive that the Jews are still obligated to follow the covenant, but we saw Paul in Acts 21 dutifully go to the temple to carry out particular ceremonies of the covenant for himself. Therefore, it is very possible just from learning the book of Acts that the Mosaic Covenant exists as a national obligation for the Jews until the end of the present realm, while it is also ineffective in obtaining God's mercy, because it is only Jesus who has died and qualified for the role of advocate before God who can obtain it for them. In which case, the Jews' observance of the Mosaic Covenant during the millennial kingdom is simply a required means for them to reveal their authentic belief in Yahweh in the midst of their submission to Jesus as their king.

This portion of Acts ends with the Sanhedrin's deciding to release Peter and John, who return to the other apostles, relate to them their experience, and together they all pray and extol God for His greatness and the story which He is telling with Jesus at the center of the plot. They also encourage God to give them the courage to continue publicly proclaiming the news of Jesus as the Messiah that God accompanies with affirming miracles.

Acts 3:1-26

The next passage we should consider is the event that started the process of Peter's and John's being confronted by the Jewish leadership, their healing the lame man in chapter 3 and explaining to the surrounding crowd how they are able to do so. Thus, Acts 3 reads,

Acts 3:1 Peter and John were going up to the temple at the ninth hour of prayer. **3:2** And a certain man, crippled from birth, was being carried, whom they used set down daily at the gate of the temple which was called Beautiful, so that he could ask for alms from those who were entering the temple. **3:3** When he saw Peter and John as they were about to go into the temple, he asked them for alms. **3:4** But Peter, along with John, gazed at him and said,

Look at us.

3:5 And he gave them his close attention, expecting to receive something from them. **3:6** But Peter said,

Silver and gold I do not have, but what I do have, I give you this—in the name of Jesus the Messiah of Nazareth, rise up and walk.

3:7 And seizing him by the right hand he lifted him up. And immediately his feet and ankles were strengthened. **3:8** And leaping up he stood and began to walk. Then, he entered with them into the temple, walking and leaping and praising God. **3:9** And all the people saw him walking and praising

God. **3:10** And they were recognizing him as the one sitting at the Beautiful Gate of the temple, and they were filled with amazement and astonishment at what had happened to him. **3:11** While he was clinging to Peter and John, all the people ran together towards them at that which is called Solomon's Porch, utterly astonished.

3:12 But when Peter saw this, he replied to the people,

Men, Israelites, why are you marveling at this, or why are you staring at us as if by our own power or devotion to God we have made him walk? **3:13** The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified His servant Jesus, whom you handed over and denied before Pilate, who judged that he should be released. **3:14** You denied the set apart and righteous one, and you asked for a murderer to be given you. **3:15** Thus, you killed the instigator of life whom God raised from the dead, of which we are witnesses.

3:16 His name has strengthened this man whom you observe and know—on the basis of belief in his name. And belief, which is through him, has given to him this perfect health in the presence of all of you. **3:17** And now, brothers, I know that you acted in ignorance, just like your leaders. **3:18** But God has thus fulfilled the things which He announced beforehand through the mouth of all His prophets, that His Messiah would suffer.

3:19 Repent, therefore, and turn, so that your immoral actions may be blotted out, **3:20** so that seasons of revival may come from the presence of Yahweh, and He sends you the appointed Messiah, Jesus, **3:21** whom heaven must receive until the times of the restoration of all things, about which God spoke through the mouth of His set apart prophets from the age.

3:22 Moses said,

Yahweh your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your brothers. You will listen to him in all that he says to you. **3:23** And it will happen that everyone who does not listen to this prophet will be completely destroyed from among the people
<Deuteronomy 18:15,19; cf. Lev. 23:29>.

3:24 Indeed, all the prophets who spoke, from Samuel on, also announced these days. **3:25** You are the sons of the prophets and of the covenant which God made with your fathers, saying to Abraham,

And in your seed all the families of the earth will be blessed <Genesis 12:3; cf. 22:18>.

3:26 For you first God raised up His servant and sent him, blessing you by turning each one of you from your evil ways.

The first part of the story is straightforward. Peter and John are apostles of Jesus and, therefore, his authoritative spokesmen. They are in Jerusalem, the capital city of the Jews, where there is also the temple which God commanded they build. The temple is the “house of God,” which we have seen in Genesis 28 means that God connects with His people, the Jews, in this building for the purpose of affirming His promises to Abraham. Peter and John approach the temple in order to pray. A lame man asks them for alms, and instead they command him to walk on the basis of Jesus of Nazareth's being the Messiah. God heals the man, who leaps and walks and praises God in front of the crowd that is there at the temple. Naturally, they are astonished, and Peter explains to them what is happening.

The first thing that he wants them to understand is that it is their God, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, who has performed this miracle. In addition, Jesus has been God's servant, His “set apart and righteous one,” and they rejected him by demanding that the Romans crucify him, which they did, even though Pilate deemed him innocent. Peter

also calls Jesus the “instigator of life,” meaning that he rescues people from death, both physical and eternal death, through God’s using Jesus as their advocate during the legal proceedings of the final judgment. Peter mentions the important fact, too, that God raised Jesus from the dead, the implication being that Jesus, by dying on the cross, qualified to assist others in rising from the dead and remaining alive for all eternity. And Peter, John, and the other apostles have personally witnessed the risen Messiah.

Peter then intimates that Jesus and belief in him that has resulted in the lame man’s being healed and will result in authentic believers’ receiving life from God instead of death is not only because Jesus experienced crucifixion, but also because his suffering is exactly what God declared through the Old Testament prophets would happen and was necessary to happen. Peter also adds that forgiveness from God is available to these Jews through belief in Jesus, which would come as very surprising news to these people who were used to seeking God’s mercy through only their offering animal sacrifices according to the Mosaic Covenant—if they lacked the kind of understanding of both the Mosaic Covenant and Jesus which the apostles have. Nevertheless, Peter is absolutely certain that Jesus will be the key not only to their obtaining God’s forgiveness, but also to their inward spiritual renewal which accompanies God’s restoring the Kingdom of Israel on the land of Israel, that will constitute God’s presence among the Jews when Jesus returns to set up this kingdom in Jerusalem. Peter calls all this the “seasons of revival,” i.e., inward revival, during the “presence of Yahweh” when “He sends to [the Jews] the appointed Messiah, Jesus,” which will be at “the times of the restoration of all things.” This last comment refers to God’s establishing Jesus’s Davidic and messianic kingdom as He also predicted “through the mouth of His set apart prophets.” We will want to remember that Peter uses the words “restoration of all things” when we look at chapter 1 of Acts.

While this exhortation by Peter to confess their sins could be construed as for the purpose of obtaining only eternal life, all the evidence we have been gathering about God’s fulfilling all His promises to the Jews is leading us to conclude that the purpose is just as much so that they acquire the earthly Kingdom of Israel when Jesus returns. This makes good sense of the language that Peter is using—words such as “seasons of revival” to refer to the inward, spiritual revival of the generation of Jews on the land of Israel when Jesus returns, and God’s “sending” the Jews “the appointed Messiah,” i.e., their king, to rule over them when He transforms them into a strong and powerful country, and the “restoration of all things” Jewish, including the Davidic kingdom on earth with the final king, Jesus, ruling from Jerusalem.

Peter then backs up these Jewish claims by reminding his listeners that Moses stated clearly that God would raise up another Jewish spokesman whom they would be obligated to obey or suffering destruction by God. When we looked at Deuteronomy 18:15 in the context of Paul’s speech in Acts 13:16-52, we concluded that Moses was speaking of a leader greater than himself, whom God would bring into existence for the people of Israel. And this leader is Jesus. Obviously, Peter also is implying that Jesus is this very prophet, about whom all the other Old Testament prophets spoke in line with God’s promise to Abraham and his Jewish descendants that it would be through them that the Gentiles and they would obtain the fulfillment of God’s promises, including the one of eternal mercy and life. Consequently, Peter can say that God has sent the risen Messiah to the Jews first, which results in their

genuinely repenting and seeking His mercy. And the implied result is that the Jews will obtain God's blessing. However, what is God's blessing for the Jews. Is it only eternal life? Or is it only the establishment of the earthly kingdom on the land of Israel with Jesus as their king? Or is it both? Putting together all the clues in Joel, Revelation, and now Acts, we are finding that it is both for the Jews and eternal life for the Gentiles. This means, too, that the "destruction" of which Moses spoke for Jews who disobey the prophet Jesus begins with God's earthly judgment immediately before Jesus' return as described by Joel and Revelation and ends with eternal destruction.

As a result, Peter and John are announcing to their Jewish audience that the clock has started even more aggressively moving towards God's fulfilling His promise to them to build them into the greatest nation on earth by providing them with the central element and means for this to happen—the crucified and risen Messiah. Jesus will not only rule over the Jews on the land of Israel, but he will also be the very foundation of God's changing their hearts so that they are genuinely repentant of their immorality and genuinely submissive to Jesus' authority as their king. Jesus will also be the means by which God blesses the Gentiles of the earth with eternal life. And because these actions by God constitute the fulfillment of His promises to Abraham and his physical descendants, it is these who also have a biblical right to hear the news about Jesus first, before the message goes out to the Gentiles. Thus, we see that God's "restoring all things" to the Jews, situating them on the land which He promised them so that their enemies never harm them again, and granting eternal life to Jews and Gentiles, requires both the first and the second appearances of Jesus as the Jews' (and, of course, believing Gentiles') king and advocate before God.

Acts 1:1-14

This fact helps us understand the apostles' question and Jesus' answer in Acts 1, which we will consider first before looking closely at Peter's quote of Joel 2 in chapter 2 of Acts. Acts 1:1-14 reads,

Acts 1:1 Theophilus, I myself composed the first story concerning all the things which Jesus began to do and teach **1:2** until the day when he was taken up and after he had instructed, through the Spirit who is different, the apostles whom he had chosen. **1:3** After he had suffered, he presented himself alive to them with many convincing proofs, appearing to them for forty days and talking about things concerning the Kingdom of God. **1:4** While he was spending time with them, he commanded them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, "Which you heard about from Me, **1:5** because John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Spirit who is different not many days from now."

1:6 Therefore, when they would come together, they were asking him,

Lord, is this the time when you are restoring the kingdom to Israel?

1:7 And he would say to them,

It is not for you to know times and seasons which the Father has established by His own authority, **1:8** but you will receive authority when the Spirit who is different comes upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and as far as the end of the earth.

1:9 And after he had said these things and they were looking at him, he was lifted up and a cloud received him out of their sight. **1:10** As they were gazing into heaven after he had gone, indeed, behold, two men in white clothing stood by them. **1:11** and they said,

Men of Galilee, why are you standing looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was received from you into heaven, will come in the same manner you watched him go into heaven.

1:12 Then, they returned to Jerusalem from the mountain which is called The Olive Grove, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day's journey away. **1:13** And when they entered, they went up into the upstairs room where they were staying—Peter, John, James, Andrew, Philip, Thomas, Bartholomew, Matthew, James of Alphaeus, Simon the Zealot, and Judas of James. **1:14** All these were busily engaged with one mind in prayer along with the women and Mary, the mother of Jesus, and his brothers.

Luke, the author of both the gospel of Luke and Acts, begins the latter by reminding his friend Theophilus (literally “God lover”) that he wrote the gospel of Luke and is now composing this account which will pick up the story at the point of Jesus’ ascension into heaven that occurred forty days after he rose from the dead. During these forty days, Jesus speaks to his apostles regarding the Kingdom of God, which includes as part of the process of setting it up the apostles’ being “baptized with the Spirit who is different,” which we will look at more carefully in chapter 2.

In v. 6 the apostles specifically ask Jesus about his “restoring the Kingdom of Israel” and whether this is when he will do so. While generic English translations make it sound as though they are asking him at this very moment before he ascends into heaven, this does not make sense in the light of how important an idea this would have been to the apostles. Would they really have waited until the fortieth day of Jesus’s appearance after his resurrection to ask this question, especially when Jesus has spent the last thirty-nine days talking to them about the “Kingdom of God?” I do not think so, and it makes more sense to interpret Luke as saying that the restoration of the Kingdom of Israel was *the* burning question for the apostles, so that, for literary purposes, Luke has them ask their question as Jesus leaves them. Therefore, assuming that this question has part of their discussion for the last thirty-nine days, it, along with Jesus’s answer, “It is not for you to know times and seasons which the Father has established by His own authority,” serve as an important segue to the statement by the two men in white clothing who appear as the apostles are looking up after watching Jesus ascend into heaven.

They comment that “this Jesus, who was received from you into heaven, will come in the same manner you watched him go into heaven.” Thus, Luke is letting Theophilus know that the restoration of the Kingdom of Israel will occur at Jesus’s second coming, not at his first coming. Luke is also informing his reader that, theologically, this has been God’s plan all along. The Messiah would first appear to suffer and qualify to be both the Messiah and the

people's priest and advocate before God at the judgment. Then, he would appear again, at some later date known only to the transcendent Creator and not to man, and "restore the Kingdom of Israel."

We notice, too, that Jesus does not object to the question as though the apostles' theology of Israel and the Jews is incorrect, which is to say that he affirms that he will "restore the kingdom to Israel." Thus, it is reasonable to interpret Luke in his telling this story in chapter 1 to affirm that God will fulfill His promise to transform the Jews into the greatest nation in history, while Luke goes on in the rest of Acts to affirm that God will also fulfill His promise to both Jews and Gentiles to create a new and eternal Kingdom of God in a new creation. This is also what makes the most sense out of Luke's ending the book of Acts with a conversation between *the sole apostle to the Gentiles*, Paul, and Jews *in Rome*. In this way, Luke is continuing to affirm that the gospel of Jesus as Messiah is always for the Jews first (cf. Acts 3:26; Romans 1:16), to announce that through Jesus He will make them a great nation by changing their hearts and providing them with eternal forgiveness, and for the Gentiles second, to announce to them that, along with believing Jews, He will bless them with eternal life.

Acts 2:1-47

Now we are ready for Acts 2 and Peter's using a quote from Joel 2 to explain what God is doing on the Day of Pentecost. All of the second chapter of Acts reads,

2:1 When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in the same place. **2:2** Suddenly there came from heaven a noise like a violent rushing wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. **2:3** And tongues like fire were seen, being divided among them, and they sat on each one of them. **2:4** And they were all filled with the Spirit who is different, and they began to speak with other languages as the Spirit was giving them to speak.

2:5 There were Jews living in Jerusalem, God-fearing men from every nation under heaven. **2:6** And when this sound occurred, the crowd came together, and they were bewildered, because each one was hearing them speaking in his own dialect. **2:7** They were confused and wondering, saying,

Behold, are not all these who are speaking Galileans? **2:8** So how is each of us hearing them speak in his own language in which he was born. **2:9** Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and those who dwell in Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, **2:10** Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and parts of Libya around Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, **2:11** Jews and converts, Cretans and Arabs, we hear them in our languages talking about the mighty acts of God.

2:12 And they all continued to be confused and perplexed, saying to one another,

What does this mean?

2:13 And others were making fun of them and saying,

They are full of wine.

2:14 But Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and declared to them,

Men, Jews and all those who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you and pay close attention to my words, 2:15 for these men are not drunk as you suppose, because it is the third hour.

2:16 But this is that which was spoken of through the prophet Joel,

2:17 Indeed, it will be in the last days, says God, I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh, and your sons and your daughters will prophesy, and your young men will see visions, and your old men will dream dreams. 2:18 And on My male slaves and on My female slaves, in those days, I will pour out My Spirit, and they will prophesy. 2:19 And I will give warning signs in heaven above and signs on the earth below—blood, fire, and vapor of smoke. 2:20 The sun will be turned into darkness and the moon into blood before the coming of the great and remarkable Day of Yahweh. 2:21 And it will be that everyone who calls on the name of Yahweh will be saved <Joel 2:28-32>.

2:22 Men, Israelites, listen to these words. Jesus the Nazarene, a man who has been confirmed by God to you by means of powers, warning signs, and signs, which God did through him in your midst, just as you yourselves know, 2:23 this man, given over by the fixed plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. 2:24 God resurrected him, having loosed the cords of death because it was impossible for Him to be held by it, 2:25 for David says with reference to him, I was always seeing Yahweh in front of me. Because He is at my right hand, I will not be disturbed.

2:26 On account of this my heart was cheered, and my tongue exulted. Moreover, my flesh will dwell in hope,

2:27 because You will not abandon my life to Hades, and You will not give your committed one to see decay.

2:28 You have made known to me the ways of life. You will fill me with joy with Your presence <Psalm 16:8-11>.

2:29 Men, brothers, it is right to say with confidence to you concerning the patriarch David, that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is in our midst to this day. 2:30 Therefore, being a spokesman for God and knowing that God had sworn to him with an oath to seat someone from the fruit of his loins on his throne, 2:31 he foresaw and spoke concerning the resurrection of the Messiah, that he would neither be abandoned to Hades, nor his flesh see decay. 2:32 God resurrected this Jesus of whom we are all witnesses.

2:33 Therefore, having been lifted up to the right hand of God and having received from the Father the promise of the Spirit who is different, he has poured out this which you both see and hear. 2:34 For David did not ascend into the heavens, but he himself says, Yahweh said to my Lord, sit at My right hand,

2:35 until I place your enemies as a footstool for your feet <Psalm 110:1>.

2:36 Therefore, let the whole house of Israel know for sure that God has made him both Lord and Messiah, this Jesus whom you crucified.

2:37 And when they heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and to the rest of the apostles,

What should we do, men, brothers?

2:38 Then, Peter said to them,

Repent and be baptized, each one of you, in the name of Jesus the Messiah for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Spirit who is different,
2:39 because the promise belongs to you, your children, and all those who are far off, as many as Yahweh our God will Himself call.⁹

2:40 And with many other words, he was carefully bearing witness for persuading them saying,

Be saved from this morally twisted generation.¹⁰

2:41 Therefore, those who embraced his message were baptized, and, in that day, about three thousand persons were added. 2:42 And they were devoting themselves to the teaching of the apostles and togetherness, to the breaking of bread and prayer. 2:43 And fear came upon every person, and many attesting miracles and signs occurred through the apostles. 2:44 And all those who were believing were together, and they were holding everything in common. 2:45 They were also selling their possessions and property and were distributing them to everyone according to his need. 2:46 Each day they were persevering with one accord in the temple, breaking bread in each house, and sharing food with gladness and singleness of heart. 2:47 They were praising God and having favor with all the people, and the Lord was adding daily to their togetherness those who were being saved.

The first four verses introduce the scene. The apostles and other disciples of Jesus are together in a building in Jerusalem. The Spirit of God causes flames of fire to rest on their heads, and they speak in foreign languages. The next nine verses describe the response of Jews and Gentiles who are visiting Jerusalem from other parts of the Roman Empire where their native tongue is not a language that men from Galilee would know. Therefore, they are surprised to hear these followers of Jesus not only speaking in foreign languages that they do not naturally know, but also talking about God and His greatness. Some of these foreigners even think that these men are drunk.

However, Peter stands up in their midst and explains that “this is that which was spoken of through the prophet Joel,” and he quotes Joel 2:28-32, which in the Hebrew reads,

Joel 2:28 And it shall come to pass after this, that I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh. And your sons and your daughters will speak on behalf of God. Your old men will dream dreams. Your young men will see visions.

2:29 And also on your servants and your maidservants, in those days I will pour out My Spirit.

2:30 And I will give signs in the heavens, and on the land blood, fire, and columns of smoke.

2:31 The sun will be turned to darkness, and the moon to blood in the presence of the coming of the **Day of Yahweh**, the great and fearful One.

⁹ Because of Peter’s experience with Cornelius and his family in Acts 10, along with Peter’s specific statement in 10:34,35, “On the basis of truth, I have reached the conclusion that God does not show favoritism. 10:35 Instead, the one who fears Him and performs righteousness in every nation is acceptable to Him,” Peter must be referring to only Jews when he says, “and all those who are far off.” Peter does not expand the horizons of authentic believers in Jesus to include the Gentiles until after and as a result of his experience in Acts 10.

¹⁰ Peter is calling the present Jewish generation a perverted one, seemingly contradicting his statement in 2:16 to the effect that the simultaneous conversion of three thousand Jews constitutes a “fulfillment” of Joel’s prophecy that God would convert all the Jews at some point in their future. Instead of this being a contradiction, it substantiates the interpretation that Peter is only saying of Joel that what is happening before his eyes on Pentecost in Jerusalem is like what God will later do according to Joel, and that it is significant enough, i.e., 3,000 plus Jews’ becoming authentic believers all at once (cf. 2:47), that he feels comfortable connecting this phenomenon, at least loosely, to Joel’s prophecy.

2:32 And it will happen that all who call upon the name of Yahweh will escape to safety, because in the mountain of Zion and Jerusalem there will be someone who escapes to safety, just as Yahweh said, even among the survivors whom Yahweh is calling—

I repeat here Peter's quote in the Greek text of Acts 2 for easy comparison,

- Acts 2:17** Indeed, it will be in the last days, says God, I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh, and your sons and your daughters will prophesy, and your young men will see visions, and your old men will dream dreams.
- 2:18** And on My male slaves and on My female slaves, in those days, I will pour out My Spirit, and they will prophesy.
- 2:19** And I will give warning signs in heaven above and signs on the earth below—blood, fire, and vapor of smoke.
- 2:20** The sun will be turned into darkness and the moon into blood before the coming of the great and remarkable Day of Yahweh.
- 2:21** And it will be that everyone who calls on the name of Yahweh will be saved <Joel 2:28-32>.
-

First, we notice that Joel does not use the phrase “in the last days.” In fact, Joel never uses this phrase (in Hebrew בְּאַחֲרֵי־הַיָּמִים (*be'achareet hayyameem*) (cf. Genesis 49:1; Isaiah 2:2); in Greek ἐν ταῖς ἐσχάταις ἡμέραις (*en tais eschatais haymerais*) (Genesis 49:1; Isaiah 2:2). If he did, it would make interpreting the book of Joel a lot easier, because he provides little help in understanding the time of the events he is describing. The time must be deduced by looking at all the somewhat obscure clues throughout the whole book, and, as stated in the body of this paper, I have found that it makes the most sense to conclude that Joel is talking about the judgment of the Jews on the land of Israel just prior to the return of Jesus the Messiah. Peter seems to agree, because he employs the phrase “in the last days” to paraphrase what Joel is saying.

However, is Peter saying that the speaking in unknown foreign languages by Jesus' followers in Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost is the one and only fulfillment of Joel 2:28-32, so that God will very soon send Jesus back to earth to defeat Israel's enemies and set up his messianic and millennial kingdom in Jerusalem? It might appear so, because Peter's words are, “this is that which was spoken of through the prophet Joel.” But there are two other viable options for how to interpret Peter.

The author of Hebrews begins his letter to Jews who are struggling in their belief in Jesus as the Messiah,

Hebrews 1:1 God, after He spoke to the fathers long ago through the prophets in many portions and in many ways, **1:2** in these the last days, has spoken to us through the Son...

Clearly, this biblical author believes that he is writing “in the last days,” literally “in these the last days” (ἐπ' ἐσχάτου τῶν ἡμερῶν τούτων (*ep eschatoo tone haymerone tootone*)). Taking into account that Peter heard ten days earlier that Jesus would return to restore the kingdom to Israel (Acts 1:6-11), he could very reasonably be saying that God's causing Jesus's followers to speak in foreign languages by His Spirit is the beginning of the last days, the end of which he does not know, but that the last days will culminate in the return of Jesus as the

Messiah. As a result, the prediction of Joel is in the process of being fulfilled, but it will not be completely fulfilled until sometime later.

Another option for interpreting Peter is that God's causing these Jews in Jerusalem to speak in foreign languages is a foreshadowing of Joel's prediction. It is an indication of a future event in the sense that the dynamic that is in play among the Jews on Pentecost is the same as that which will be in play when Jesus returns. This option makes the most sense in the light of the evidence from Joel, Revelation, etc. Thus, Peter is saying that the miraculous event of Pentecost is not only the kind of thing that God will do among the Jews when Jesus returns, but that when He does, it will be a massive revival involving the entire nation of Israel, which will follow a horrific experience of judgment by God and will accompany the return of Jesus as the Messiah.

With this last option, we can see that when Jesus returns, God will fulfill Joel's prophecy by producing a national and inward revival of the Jewish people, so that every time a Jew becomes an authentic believer between Jesus' first and second coming, the national dynamic is at play in the individual Jew, and it is a reminder that His goal is to judge and save Israel through the means of the Messiah, which will eventually happen a some unknown time in the future. Therefore, Peter is not stating that Joel's prophecy is now being fulfilled completely and only here on the Day of Pentecost, fifty days after Jesus rose from the dead. Instead, he is saying that, just as God will use His Spirit to change the entire nation of Israel at Jesus' return, He is using His Spirit on a smaller scale to change the Jews who are speaking with unknown foreign languages on the Day of Pentecost.

Peter goes on to explain to his audience that David spoke of the Messiah's resurrection in Psalm 16 after God first gave him the Davidic Covenant which promised an eventual, permanent king of Israel (cf. 2 Samuel 7). We saw Paul quoted the same verse in his speech to the Jews in the synagogue of Psidian Antioch in Acts 13. Both Paul and Peter interpret David to mean that a future king from his line of descendants would die and rise from the dead, before his body had the opportunity to decay. And both Paul and Peter know this king to be Jesus of Nazareth. Peter also quotes another of David's psalms, Psalm 110, to remind his audience that David viewed the final king from his descendants as his "Lord," for whom God would crush his enemies when He not only raised him from the dead, but also raised him to "sit at [His] right hand," meaning that Jesus had definitely qualified to be God's instrument of fulfilling His promises that we have considered in Genesis 12 to both Jews and Gentiles. This naturally includes the promise of Joel 2:28 of God's "pouring out His Spirit" on the Jews as part of the return of the Messiah. Consequently, Peter is saying that speaking in foreign languages by Jesus's current followers points to and confirms that God will make of Israel a great nation in the future when Jesus returns (as implied by Jesus and stated by the two men in Acts 1), living on the land of Israel completely unharmed by their enemies, because Jesus will be ruling over them.

As a result of Peter's speech, three thousand of his listeners, probably mostly Jews, become believers in Jesus the Messiah. Interestingly enough, they are not described as speaking in unknown foreign languages as a demonstration of God's pouring out His Spirit on them. Instead, Luke mentions that they are baptized in the name of Jesus, they continue learning about Jesus from the apostles, they eat together, they watch God confirm the apostles' message with miracles, and they share their wealth with one another. In addition,

God daily adds more believers to their number. Thus, we can say that these Jews' conversion to Christianity constitutes an event in line with Joel's prediction that Peter quoted, so that Jewish conversion to Christianity over the last nineteen hundred years or so points to "the last days" of the present realm when God will change the heart of every Jew living on the land of Israel at the return of Jesus, who will establish his Jewish, messianic kingdom in Israel.

We should also take note of Peter's statement in vs. 38,39 to these Jews in Jerusalem who are becoming authentic believers in the Messiah, that the "promise" in this context of *forgiveness* and *receiving the Holy Spirit* ("the Spirit who is different" as I have translated the word "holy") belongs to them and their descendants, i.e., Jewish descendants. Because we have seen in Acts 10 how surprised even the apostles are when God commands Peter to present the message of Jesus to Cornelius and his fellow Gentiles, it makes sense to interpret Peter's additional words in 2:39 "and all those who are far off" as referring to only Jews. Thus, he is saying that Jews who are not currently living on the land of Israel and have been dispersed during their history to foreign lands will receive this same promise of forgiveness and the Holy Spirit. Peter could very easily mean that eventually God will bring these dispersed Jews back to the land of Israel for the fulfillment of His promises that involved the Messiah and his messianic kingdom. For example, we have looked at the fact that God says in Jeremiah 23:3,

Jeremiah 23:3 And I will gather the remnant of My flock from all the lands from where I have driven them, and I will cause them to return to the pasture, and they will bear fruit, and they will be many.

Conclusion

Our conclusion from this study in Acts that includes Peter's quote of Joel 2:28-32 is that God's reach towards the Jews is never too short, and His plans are to send their Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth, to them once more, so that God destroys their enemies, molds them into the greatest nation of human history, forgives them for their immoral actions, changes them inwardly and they become authentic believers in Jesus the Messiah, and ultimately grants them eternal life with believing Gentiles in the permanent new creation of the Kingdom of God. In this way, the Messiah is the hope of Israel, to grant the Jews the status of the greatest nation in human history and entrance into the eternal Kingdom of God, and to use Abraham and his descendants, namely himself, as the very means by which Gentiles also gain entrance into God's kingdom of the next and permanent realm.

In addition, at Jesus' return, God will resurrect from the dead both Jews and Gentiles who had been authentic believers in God and His Messiah in history, and He will lift from the earth those who are living as authentic believers, so that both groups encounter Jesus as he is descending to set up the millennial kingdom in Jerusalem. God will also transform these resurrected and lifted believers into immortal and morally perfect beings, and they will rule over the millennial kingdom with Jesus until God destroys the present realm and creates a new, eternal realm. It is in this final form of the Kingdom of God that all authentic believers in human history will reside for all eternity as immortal, morally perfect subjects of their king, Jesus of Nazareth, the Jewish Messiah.

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As a result, the modern trend that fails to see how foundational are God's promises to the rest of the story which He is telling and renders His promises to Abraham irrelevant and wrong as they are stated in Genesis 12:1-3, along with other ideas in the Old Testament, does God and the Bible a great disservice by ignoring God's perfect character, disconnecting Him from the Jews and their earthly destiny on the land of Israel under Jesus' leadership, and eliminating Jesus' role as first the Messiah of the Jews and second the Messiah of the Gentiles, while trying to lump these two and the order in which the Bible presents them into only one Messiahship. Yes, Jesus is the very center of cosmic history, but not at the expense of the Jews, but in support of their role on earth and in heaven. As Paul, for example, reveals in his discussions in Acts with both Jews and Gentiles, the Old Testament is true and the accurate basis of understanding Jesus, not the other way around, which in no way denigrates Jesus, but only highlights that it is His God and ours who establishes His plans and purposes in the Old Testament and demonstrates them in greater detail with the first appearance of Jesus as the Jewish Messiah, while both the Old Testament and New Testament inerrantly and accurately point us towards His second appearance to complete God's tasks of bringing about the earthly Kingdom of Israel and the eternal Kingdom of Heaven.