

Gospel Gleanings, "...especially the parchments"

Volume 31, Number 41

October 12, 2014



What Lies Ahead?

When they therefore were come together, they asked of him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel? And he said unto them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power. But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth. And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight. And while they looked stedfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel; Which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven. (Acts 1:6–11, KJV 1900)

Our study passage is the only passage that provides a detailed account of Jesus' ascension. Therefore, we should linger with it and probe its rich treasures thoroughly. In the two prior verses, Jesus instructed the disciples to remain in Jerusalem until they experienced a special outpouring from the Father, something that He had told them, but they could not fully understand it till they experienced its reality. He associated this event with John's prophecy of baptism with the Holy Ghost. Our safest and best interpretation of Scripture is always to take note when one Scripture interprets another. Follow Scripture's interpretation of itself. Jesus associated this unusual baptism with something that these men should experience "...not many days hence," with the implication that the event should occur in Jerusalem, the reason they were to remain in the city. This baptism was not intended as a potential for all believers, but as a special experience for the disciples on this certain day.

I have occasionally been asked my thoughts regarding Peter's citation of Joel 2:28-32 in Acts 2:16-21. The frequent question ignores the simple language of the passage. Peter stated, "But **this is that** which was spoken by the prophet Joel." (Acts 2:16; emphasis added) Notice the clear point that Peter made, "But this is that..." He didn't say, "But this is one phase of that," or "But this is a partial fulfillment of that," or "This partially fulfills that...but more is yet to come." Peter's language leaves no question. What happened on Pentecost in Acts 2 fulfills Joel's prophecy. Period. I believe Peter's inspired explanation with no need to add to it or to expand it. "But this is that..." It was this extraordinary outpouring of the Spirit of God that Jesus told the disciples would occur in them in Jerusalem "...not many days hence."

Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel? We could learn far more than we ordinarily consider by pondering this one question. The disciples understood what Jesus told the leaders of Judaism during His public ministry.

Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof. (Matthew 21:43)

By their words to Jesus, the disciples fully understood that the Jewish people had lost God's kingdom in whatever way they once possessed it.

*"...wilt thou at this time **restore again**..."*

Various commentaries take this question from the disciples and catapult it to suppose that the disciples believed in some form of dispensationalism or millennialism, and that they were asking Jesus if the time had come for it to begin. In fact, the disciples were looking back to a previous era when the Jewish people basked in the Lord's glory and blessings as they followed Him in faithful obedience. They never experienced anything remotely akin to the era described by either of these beliefs regarding the future. The disciples were not expecting a future millennial age of Jesus personally ruling Planet Earth in righteous and sovereign dominion. They were interested in a restoration of blessings upon the Jews similar to past ages when they obeyed and the Lord blessed them. Their question in fact does not at all lend support to either dispensational or millennial beliefs.

Is it possible that, at some future time, a large number of Jewish people might embrace Jesus and the faith of New Testament Scripture? I would not deny the possibility. However, I doubt that Jewish people as a culture will ever replace Gentile believers in the New Testament Church. When Jesus came and completed His work, He removed the dividing wall that separated Jews from Gentiles, treating one differently from the other. (Ephesians 2:11-17) I find nothing in this context to indicate any intent on His part to restore that dividing wall. It was removed and shall not be rebuilt by Him.

Further, we find ample evidence in New Testament Scripture to describe how any person ever finds the Lord's blessings and enjoys the fruits of His kingdom, "...righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost." (Romans 14:17) The

process is never culture-wide, but always individual and personal. When Jesus announced His judgment against Jerusalem and the people who then so grievously mismanaged His temple, He included an explanation of how they could reverse that judgment.

For I say unto you, Ye shall not see me henceforth, till ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord. (Matthew 23:39)

Jesus is the One and only One who came "...in the name of the Lord." His judgment indelibly associated their seeing His face in blessings with their praising and blessing Him. Despite passionate and sincere efforts by dispensationalists in particular to make the Jews' return to their native land in 1947 a fulfillment of Scripture, the character of the present people in Israel contradicts rather than agrees with Jesus' sentence. Try openly preaching Jesus in Israel today and see how your preaching is received. These people have earned the privilege of having a place to call their own as an earthly nation, but they have not at all fulfilled Biblical prophecy.

Jesus' judgment was against the leaders of the nation and religion of that time in Jerusalem. His promise of blessing, of seeing His face again, is made to individuals who, from the heart, say "Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord." Therefore, my answer to those who hope for a national restoration is this. The Lord's church and kingdom today is quite broad enough for every Jew and for every Gentile believer who blesses His name and embraces Him and His message in faith. Neither Jew nor Gentile who so believes in Him is now—or shall ever be—excluded because of their race or cultural background.

As we sweep away the errant interpretations of the disciples' question and Jesus' answer, we get to the truth of the lesson. The disciples longed for restoration of the former ages when their ancestors followed God in the shadow of their great Rock, and rejoiced in the light of His glory. Was that time upon them? "Wilt thou **at this time**..." If we follow the language, they were not at all asking about an eschatological or end-times situation of any kind. They were interested in something that they would witness in their lifetimes.

Jesus answers their question simply and clearly. "It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power." Looking into the future was not part of Jesus' assignment to these men as His disciples. It is also not part of His assignment to us. Jesus does not affirm their hope for restoration, and He does not in any way open the door or prophecy of a future millennial era. He simply rebukes the disciples for trying to anticipate what was not in their view or divine assignment. Jesus prepared them to be His witnesses, to give personal testimony and Biblical

evidence, where ever they went, of His coming, fulfilling Old Testament prophecies, and saving "...his people from their sins." (Matthew 1:21) He never assigned them to become future prognosticators or "Star-gazers" who thought themselves able to know the future. Living so as to be a credible and faithful witness to Jesus and His resurrection is a full-time assignment. It leaves no time or energy available for star-gazing or prognosticating. The more we or any people invest our time and energy in predicting what we cannot know fully from Scripture robs us of our credibility as His witnesses.

The primary charge that each believer in Christ has received from the Lord is to be His witnesses. That first generation of disciples, the eleven in particular, had witnessed Jesus' life and miracles firsthand. They had also now witnessed Him in glorious resurrection for approximately forty days. He charges them to avoid speculation about what the Father may or may not have in store for the future and to invest themselves in being His faithful witnesses. John reflects this focused assignment of being His witnesses.

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life; (For the life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and shew unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us;) **That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you**, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ. And these things write we unto you, that your joy may be full. (1 John 1:1-4; emphasis added)

If we follow Jesus' commandments today, we must live so that our words, attitudes, and actions are credible witnesses of His love and grace in us, as living evidence of "...Christ in you the hope of glory." After restoring the wild Gadarene, Jesus gave him similar instruction, "Go home to thy friends, and tell them how great things the Lord hath done for thee, and hath had compassion on thee." (Mark 5:19b) If your relatives, neighbors, or work associates rely solely on your personal conduct, including words, attitudes, and actions, would they gather from your conduct that you have spent time with Jesus? Would they see His grace in you? (Colossians 4:6) Would your personal life motivate them to desire time with both you and Him, or does your conduct motivate them to exit your presence as quickly as possible? The focus of the gospel is always to be on the "whole counsel of God," (Acts 20:26-27), but Scriptures such as we here examine remind us. If we follow Scripture, we shall not only witness its true teachings, but we shall also manifest His presence, love, and grace in our lives. Otherwise, people will see little reason in

us to take note of anything that we may care to say about Scripture. The Christian culture, in the broad sense of that term, overflows with philosophical types who will tell you more than they know about exactly what the Bible teaches, but their words, attitudes, and actions are void of His sweet fragrance and grace. Therefore, their words lack edification and give their hearers no credible reason to hear or to believe them. Lord help us this week to spend much time praying for the Lord to convict us and to guide us to so live His grace that our whole life speaks the kind grace of Him and of His gospel. Only as we so live can we fulfill His command to be His witnesses in our lives. (John 13:35)

Little Zion Primitive Baptist Church
16434 Woodruff
Bellflower, California

Worship service each Sunday 10:30 A. M.
Joseph R. Holder Pastor