

work on earth by being his witnesses to all peoples. In this way Jesus is blessing all peoples on earth.

### **THE MESSAGE OF JESUS AND HIS DISCIPLES (ACTS 4-28)**

Throughout his earthly ministry, Jesus called on the nation of Israel to submit to him as their Messiah. He verified his identity by doing miracles that only God could do (John 3:2). The nation rejected him and though that meant Jesus' departure to heaven, the message did not change. Still Jesus' disciples called on the nation of Israel to recognize Jesus as their Messiah and submit to him (cf. Acts 5:42). Their testimony was verified by the miracles that Jesus did through them (by the Spirit he sent). They also taught something Jesus did not teach to the nation: his crucifixion and resurrection. Because the Messiah's death could be a stumbling block to faith, it was important for the disciples to emphasize that Jesus rose from the dead in fulfillment of the OT Scriptures (Acts 4:33).

Throughout the book of Acts, the disciples would continue to bring the message of the crucified and risen Messiah to Israel and the nations in advance of Jesus' return, judgment, and establishment of the kingdom. The gathering of people from Israel and the nations to a body of believers did not constitute the fulfillment of God's kingdom promises but was the way God was working until Jesus' return. The disciples took the message of the Messiah to Israel first because he was Israel's Messiah, but Israel's refusal to listen would not keep the good news from going to the Gentiles (Acts 13:46-48; 28:23-31). Thus Israel not only missed out on the blessings in accepting their Messiah but also in sharing those blessings with the nations.

### **GOING FURTHER**

How does the book of Acts show, on the one hand, fulfillment of the OT in the person of Jesus and, on the other hand, lack of fulfillment of other promises of the OT? What does this mean?

### **PREPARATION FOR THE NEXT STUDY**

Read Romans 9–11. Trace Paul's argument concerning whether God's promises can be trusted or not. What does this mean for the future of Israel?

## **THE KINGDOM AND THE CHURCH (ACTS 1-3)**

### **PREPARATION FOR THIS STUDY**

Read Acts 1-3. Pay attention to verses about the kingdom, the church, and Jesus. How are the kingdom and church related? What is Jesus doing now?

### **JESUS ALIVE; NOW WHAT?**

The consistent hope of the Old Testament was the redemption of the world through the coming of the Messiah to establish God's kingdom on earth. Jesus' announcement that the kingdom was near and his demonstration of his messianic identity suggested that the time had come. But Jesus was rejected and crucified by his own people. Yet this too was a fulfillment of what God had intended, for the righteous king had to die for the sin of the people. But Jesus has been raised and vindicated. Now what? Try to put yourself in the disciples' shoes in the days following the resurrection. What expectations would you have? What questions would you ask?

### **KINGDOM NOW? (ACTS 1)**

The last question that the disciples asked Jesus before he ascended into heaven concerned when Jesus would restore the kingdom to Israel (Acts 1:6). They had not been disabused of the OT teaching that God would fulfill his promises to Israel through the establishment of a righteous kingdom on earth. More importantly, Jesus did not rebuke them for having a wrong expectation. He could have denied their expectation and reprimanded them for anticipating a literal fulfillment of the prophecies. Instead he told them that they could not know the *timing*, and that the Spirit would come on them so they would be Jesus' witnesses to the world (Acts 1:7-8). Some suppose that the coming of the Spirit was identical with the restoration of the kingdom to Israel, but in this case, nearly all of the content of the OT promises must be denied. A better view is that the Spirit would empower the disciples to witness to Jesus' coming kingdom so that the nations might repent before that day arrived.

## **THE COMING OF THE SPIRIT (ACTS 2:1-21)**

On the day of Pentecost, God sent his Holy Spirit to fill the believers and enable them to witness of Jesus to people from all nations. That this was their mission was clear from the initial sign of the Spirit's coming: the disciples could speak in foreign languages. Peter explained this miraculous event by quoting from the book of Joel, showing how God's Spirit being poured out was anticipated in advance of the coming of God's kingdom (= the Day of the Lord). The urgent need was for repentance, for judgment would precede salvation, but everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved (Acts 2:14-21). Repentance was particularly necessary because the people had crucified God's Messiah.

## **PETER'S MESSAGE (ACTS 2:22-36)**

Peter's sermon was really just a lengthy explanation to their question: why are you speaking in tongues? Peter answered that the speaking in tongues was the result of the pouring out of the Spirit which was a work of Jesus who is now at God's right hand. Jesus is at the Father's side because God exalted Jesus after his resurrection. This resurrection was predicted in advance by David, indicating that God was accomplishing his purposes even though evil men were acting according to their desires by crucifying Jesus. Thus in his life, death, resurrection, and ascension, Jesus fulfilled the plan of God. And it is this same Jesus who was the one who caused the disciples to speak in foreign languages by pouring out his Spirit.

## **IS JESUS THE KING NOW?**

Because too many people find in Acts 2 ideas that are not there, it is worth noting what the passage does not say: it does not say that the kingdom is now established, it does not say that Jesus is now ruling as king, it does not say that any or all of the OT promises have been fulfilled in the church. Peter quotes Scripture (1) to establish that the coming of the Spirit is a work of God that calls for repentance, (2) to prove that Jesus must rise from the dead; (3) to explain that Jesus is now at God's right hand waiting for the establishment of the kingdom. When Jesus ascended to heaven, his status as king remained the same as when he was on earth: he was still the "king of the Jews," the rightful heir to the throne of David, but he did not exercise that rule before his crucifixion or after his resurrection. Jesus' status is similar to that of David during

the years that Saul was king: he has been anointed, but he awaits his coronation. He has the right to rule, but has not yet been given the authority. Just as the wicked Saul prevented David from becoming king, so the enemies of God now rule until God removes them and places Jesus on the throne.

## **THE CHURCH**

Since Jesus is not now establishing his kingdom, what is he doing? He is pouring out his Spirit on his followers so that they will be his witnesses to the nations so that all people will repent before judgment comes and it is too late to be admitted into his kingdom. The people who repent and are forgiven form a new body known as the church. They are to be baptized and they receive the gift of the Spirit. Their community is characterized by apostolic teaching, fellowship, eating together, prayer, and sharing resources (Acts 2:38-47). All who repent of their sins and follow Jesus become part of this community and there is no other group to join or avenue to follow that is pleasing to God (cf. Acts 4:12).

## **REPENTANCE BEFORE KINGDOM (ACTS 3)**

The raising of the lame man gave Peter an opportunity to explain that this miracle was the work of Jesus. How could this be since Jesus had been crucified by the people of Jerusalem? It is so because God raised Jesus from the dead. This living Jesus is responsible for this man's healing (Acts 3:11-16). What this means is that the people must repent of their sins so that (1) they would be forgiven; (2) God would send times of refreshing; (3) God would send Jesus the Messiah to restore everything (Acts 3:19-21). Jesus is the one about whom Moses, Samuel, and all the prophets spoke; he is the one who would bless all peoples on earth, beginning with the Jews (Acts 3:22-26).

In this explanation, Peter continues to clarify the current situation following Jesus' ascension. He does not say that the church is the kingdom, but he says that Jesus must remain in heaven until it is time for the kingdom. He does not say that the disciples are establishing Jesus' kingdom on earth, but he says that God will establish the kingdom in the future when he sends Jesus. He is emphatic that Jesus is now working on earth, but he never suggests that he is now reigning on earth. As Jesus had intended, his disciples are now continuing Jesus'