

The
HARVEST
HANDBOOK™
OF BIBLE
PROPHECY

ED HINDSON
MARK HITCHCOCK
TIM LAHAYE
GENERAL EDITORS



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Introduction

Bible prophecy reveals God’s plan for the future in various passages throughout the Scriptures. The study of eschatology (“last things”) especially focuses on the prophecies of future events that are yet to be fulfilled. As the apostle Peter said, “Holy men of God [the prophets] spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit” (2 Peter 1:21 NKJV, insert added for clarification). The accuracy of their inspired writings has captured the minds and hearts of believers throughout the centuries. Their prophecies affirm the divine inspiration of the Scriptures. They give us guidance for the present and hope for the future.

This edition of *The Harvest Handbook of Bible Prophecy* expands on the earlier edition of *The Popular Encyclopedia of Bible Prophecy* co-edited by Tim LaHaye and Ed Hindson, originally published in 2004. This new handbook includes many of the original articles and contributors (some of whom are now with the Lord). The current volume also includes several new articles, new contributors, and revised and expanded versions of several original articles.

The legitimate study of Bible prophecy seeks to let Scripture speak for itself. Thus, this volume avoids the kind of reckless speculation that all too often is found in some prophetic circles. Rather, we have asked each contributor to focus on the basic elements of their topic as it is expressed in the pages of the Bible itself. Scripture’s timeless truths are as valid today as when they were first written. They look down the corridor of time into the

distant future with clear and precise accuracy. Thus, they give us a complete picture of our amazing future destiny.

We compiled a team of prophecy experts who have written on the most important subjects of prophetic study. They may differ slightly on minor points of discussion, but they are all in agreement with the major issues of biblical eschatology, particularly in terms of holding to the pretribulation, premillennial view of the end times.

The topics covered in this handbook have been arranged alphabetically for ease of study, page numbers have been included for ease of reference, and the articles have been written to appeal to both those who are new to prophecy and those who are experienced students of the subject. We hope this new volume will inspire you to search the Scriptures and become, as the apostle Paul admonished, “Approved to God...rightly dividing the word of truth” (2 Timothy 2:15 NKJV).

Our sincere prayer is that these articles will inform your mind, bless your heart, and stir your soul with the blessed hope of Jesus’ coming. As our Lord Himself instructed us, we are continually watching for His imminent return to call us home to be with Him. In the meantime, we are challenged and admonished to keep watching, be ready, and continue serving Him until He comes (Matthew 24:42-46).

Ed Hindson
Mark Hitchcock

Abomination of Desolation

The phrases *abomination of desolation*, *desolating abomination*, and *abomination that makes desolate* refer to violations of the ritual purity of the Jewish Temple in Jerusalem. They translate the Hebrew term *shiqquz(im) m'shomem* and the Greek term *bdelugma tes eremoseos*, and they appear in prophecies about the desecration and defilement of the Temple in both A.D. 70 and at the end of the age.

Old Testament Terms

In the Old Testament, the phrase occurs only in Daniel (9:27; 11:31; 12:11). It conveys the feeling of horror that God's people feel when they witness criminal and barbaric acts of idolatry. These acts rendered the Temple ritually unfit for the worship and service of God.

In Daniel 12:11 we read of a foreign invader abolishing the regular sacrifice and substituting "an abomination of desolation." The word "abomination" shows how appalled Daniel was at the forcible intrusion of idolatry into a place of sanctity in order to cause defilement.

New Testament Terms

In the New Testament, the phrase appears only in the Olivet Discourse (Matthew 24:15; Mark 13:14), where Jesus has Daniel's prophecy in mind. The Greek term *eremos* ("desolation") does appear in Luke 21:20, but it does not refer to the technical phrase and describes the condition of Jerusalem in general, not the Temple in particular. Jesus used the same word in Matthew 23:38, and even though He was referring to the Second Temple, He was predicting its destruction (rather than its desecration) and God's judgment upon it. This is quite distinct from the desecration caused by the abomination of desolation, which results in divine judgment

not upon the Temple but upon the one who desecrates it (see Daniel 9:27). Daniel's and Jesus' use of the phrase clearly influenced other prophetic scriptures (2 Thessalonians 2:3-4; Revelation 11:1-2).

The New Testament uses *bdelugma* (the Greek word translated "abomination") four times (Luke 16:15; Revelation 7:4-5; 21:27). The Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Old Testament) uses it 17 times. *Bdelugma* comes from a root term that means "to make foul" and "to stink." Thus it refers to something that makes one feel nauseous, and by implication, something morally abhorrent and detestable. As with the Hebrew meaning in the Old Testament, the New Testament Greek term points particularly to idols or idolatrous practices. The Greek word *eremoseos* (translated "desolation") means "to lay waste, make desolate, bring to ruin" (see Matthew 12:25; Luke 11:17; Revelation 17:16; 18:17,19).

Theological Meaning

In both Hebrew and Greek, the phrase *the abomination of desolation* is an unusual grammatical construction. The best explanation for this is the literary and theological linkage of *abomination* and *desolation* in the prophetic writings of Jeremiah and Ezekiel. These texts treat extensively the desecration and defilement of the Temple, and they frequently mention the abominations and desolations of pagan profanation of the Sanctuary (Jeremiah 4:1,27; 7:10; 44:22; Ezekiel 5:11,14-15; 7:20) as well as the foreign invaders who will further desecrate and destroy the Temple (Jeremiah 4:6-8; Ezekiel 6:11; 7:20-23). Jeremiah 44:22 in particular states that Israel's abominations have caused the desolation of the Land and made it "an object of horror" (compare Ezekiel 5:11,15; 7:20-24; 36:19-21).

Historical Background

Some critical scholars have dismissed an eschatological interpretation of the abomination of desolation in Daniel, assuming all

references must refer to Antiochus' desecration and claiming Daniel was written *after* this event. However, Jesus understood that the historical application of the phrase to Antiochus' desecration was a pattern of the ultimate eschatological event—the abomination of the Antichrist. Citing Daniel's prophecy (some 200 years after Antiochus' desecration) and referring to the still-future abomination of desolation (Matthew 24:15; Mark 13:14), Jesus affirmed both His and Daniel's awareness of the eschatological application of the phrase.

Prophetic Implications

Jesus saw His message as a continuation of the biblical prophets and evaluated His generation in the light of them. He frequently cited Jeremiah and Zechariah and applied these prophecies to the soon-coming judgment of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 as well as the more distant final judgment. For example, at the “cleansing of the Temple,” Jesus quoted both Jeremiah 7 (which referred to the threat of ritual defilement to the Temple following Jeremiah's Temple sermon) and texts in Isaiah and Zechariah (which referred to the Temple's future state). Jesus' Olivet Discourse also sets the Temple in an eschatological context.

Matthew and Mark placed the abomination of desolation in the time when “the end will come” (Matthew 24:14). This separates the period of “tribulations” or “birth pangs” (Matthew 24:6-12; Mark 13:7-9) from the “great tribulation” period (Matthew 24:21; Mark 13:19). Luke did this in Luke 21:24 by separating the event of Jerusalem's desolation (A.D. 70) and the times of the Gentiles (present age) from the time when “the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.”

Eschatological Focus

Any interpretation except the eschatological leaves us with unresolved details that we must either interpret in a nonliteral, nonhistorical manner or dismiss altogether. The eschatological view also explains the meaning of types that await their anti-type for ultimate

fulfillment. Moreover, Daniel's seventieth week, and especially its signal event of the abomination of desolation, influenced the literary structure of the Olivet Discourse and the judgment section of the book of Revelation (chapters 6–19). Jesus' interpretation of the order of the events of the seventieth week in the context of prophetic history appears to confirm an eschatological interpretation for Daniel 9:27. Matthew 24:7-14 predicts that persecution, suffering, and wars will continue to the end of the age, climaxing in a time of unparalleled distress (verses 21-22). This corresponds to “the time of Jacob's distress” (Daniel 12:1; Jeremiah 30:7). Only *after* these events does Jesus make reference to Daniel 9:27 (verse 15) concerning the signal event of this time of Tribulation.

Although the phrase *abomination of desolation* does not appear in Paul's description of the end-time desecration of the Temple in 2 Thessalonians 2:4, he obviously had this event in view. For example, the Septuagint sometimes uses both *bdelugma* (“abomination”) and *anomia* (“lawlessness”) to refer to idolatrous practices. Thus in 2 Thessalonians 2:3-4, Paul described the figure who magnifies himself above every idol as “the man of lawlessness.” In fact, Paul's explanation of this event serves as a commentary on both Daniel's “abomination of desolation” texts (particularly Daniel 9:27) and Jesus' statement of it as a “sign” in the Olivet Discourse. Moreover, Paul used the event to answer the same time-related question of the end time that Jesus' disciples asked. This further affirms the eschatological interpretation of the abomination of desolation.

Abomination of the Antichrist

Paul introduces the desecration of the Temple in 2 Thessalonians 2:4 by saying that the man of lawlessness “exalts himself.” He elevates himself “over every so-called god or object of worship.” While this might indicate a superlative blasphemy of God such as in Revelation 13:6, the immediate setting is the

future (rebuilt) Jerusalem Temple, and so the “objects of worship” are sacred vessels (see 2 Chronicles 5:5-7; Hebrews 9:2-5) and the “desolation” occurs within the innermost sacred part of the Temple (the Holy of Holies), where God’s presence was previously manifested (Exodus 25:22; 30:6; see also Ezekiel 43:1-7).

The abomination, however, is the Antichrist’s act of enthroning himself in the place of deity to “display himself” (Greek, *apodeiknunta*) as God (literally, “that he *is* God”). This blasphemous act fulfills Daniel’s prediction that the Antichrist “will exalt and magnify himself above every god and will speak monstrous things against the God of gods” (Daniel 11:36). With the satanic background of Revelation 12:9,12-17; 13:4-10, the abomination has allusions to Isaiah 14:13-14 and Ezekiel 28:2-9, where the usurping figures “raise [their] throne above the stars of God,” “make [themselves] like the Most High,” and declare, “I am god; I sit in the seat of the gods.”

Writing to a first-century audience at a time when the Second Temple was still standing, Paul’s reference to “the temple of God” could only mean one place—the Jewish Temple in Jerusalem.

We also have other reasons for rejecting the symbolic interpretation and applying the prophecy to a literal Temple (and therefore a literal abomination of desolation): (1) In the few places where Paul used the Greek word *naos* (“temple”) to mean something other than the actual Holy Place at Jerusalem (1 Corinthians 3:16; 6:19; 2 Corinthians 6:16; Ephesians 2:21), he always explained his special meaning so that his readers would understand his metaphorical usage. (2) The word “temple” in 2 Thessalonians 2:4 has the definite article (“*the* temple”) in contrast to Paul’s metaphorical usage, where “temple” is usually anarthrous (“*a* temple.”) (3) “In the temple of God” modifies the verb “takes his seat” (Greek, *kathisai*), a verb suggesting a definite locality, not an institution (such as the church). If Paul were referring to apostasy

in the church, he would better have expressed this with a verb for “enthronement” or “usurpation” rather than a verb that referred to the literal act of “taking a seat.”

The ante-Nicene church fathers affirmed the literal understanding of this passage. For example, Irenaeus (A.D. 185) wrote: “But when this Antichrist shall have devastated all things in this world, he will reign for three years and six months, and sit in the Temple at Jerusalem; and then the Lord will come from heaven in the clouds, in the glory of the Father, sending this man and those who follow him into the lake of fire; but bringing in for the righteous the times of the kingdom.” Irenaeus’ literal interpretation of the Temple’s desecration is both eschatological and premillennial. By contrast, the symbolic or “spiritual” use of “temple” for the church does not appear in developed form until the third century A.D. with Origen, who was influenced by the allegorical interpretations of the Hellenistic idealist school of Philo.

Consequently, the eschatological interpretation of the abomination of desolation has both textual support and the witness of early church apologists. It warns us of the future day of deception and desolation at the midpoint of the Tribulation, which will call for divine judgment that climaxes in the return of the Lord.

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Abrahamic Covenant

The fountainhead of Bible prophecy begins with the Abrahamic covenant (Genesis 12:1-3,7; 13:14-17; 15:1-21; 17:1-21; 22:15-18). This agreement is the “mother of all redemptive covenants,” and God’s blessings springing forth from it extend to all mankind throughout the ages.

An Unconditional Covenant

The Abrahamic covenant is an unconditional agreement or pact in which God reveals His sovereign election of Abraham and his descendants and declares His decrees for them. Arnold Fruchtenbaum (p. 570) explains, “An unconditional covenant can be defined as a sovereign act of God whereby God unconditionally obligates Himself to bring to pass definite promises, blessings, and conditions for the covenanted people. It is a unilateral covenant. This type of covenant is characterized by the formula ‘I will’ which declares God’s determination to do exactly as He promised.”

The covenant or treaty formats commonly used in the second millennium B.C. highlight the unconditional nature of the Abrahamic covenant. The Bible contains three kinds of covenants: (1) the royal grant treaty, (2) the suzerain–vassal treaty, and (3) the parity treaty.

The royal grant treaty is an unconditional, promissory covenant based on a king’s desire to reward a loyal servant. Examples include the Abrahamic covenant (Genesis 12:1-3; 15), the Davidic covenant (2 Samuel 7:8-17), and the Land of Israel covenant (Deuteronomy 30:1-10).

God confirmed and sealed the Abrahamic covenant in Genesis 15 through a unique procedure whereby He put Abram into a deep sleep and bound Himself to keep the covenant regardless of Abraham’s response. Since God is the only one who swore to keep the covenant, it is clearly an unconditional covenant, based solely on God. Thus, we can be

absolutely confident that He will keep it and bring to pass in history every stipulation of the agreement.

Comparing the Abrahamic covenant with parallel expressions in the ancient Near East shows that it is a royal grant treaty. Genesis 26:5 says, “Abraham obeyed Me and kept My charge, My commandments, My statutes and My laws.” The term “law” is from the Hebrew *torah*, which basically means “to direct, teach, or instruct.” The first verb of Genesis 26:5 is “obeyed,” referring to Abraham’s obedience to sacrifice Isaac (Genesis 22:1-2). This is similar to terminology found at Amarna in covenant contexts. The second verb is “kept,” paralleling an Assyrian grant in which Ashurbanipal rewarded his servant Bulta with a grant because he “kept the charge of my kingship.” Both of these verbs indicate a personal relationship rather than a legal code of ethics. Thus, obedience to *torah* flows from a covenant relationship with God.

Abraham’s obedience was not based on legalistic compulsion but rather expressed his faithfulness to God. “A close examination of the context reveals no covenant stipulations which could be viewed as pure legislative or ethical codes. What the context does reveal is that God has praised His servant Abraham because he has been faithful to do whatever the Lord instructed him to do. He did it not out of compulsion to legislation, but in a faith response to the instruction of God” (Dean, p. 13).

Royal grant treaties or covenants were unconditional. This point is important for Bible prophecy because they emphasize that God is obligated to fulfill His promise specifically to the original parties of the covenant. For example, we believe that God must fulfill the promises He made to national Israel through unconditional covenants such as the Abrahamic, Davidic, and Land covenants. If this is true, then they must be fulfilled literally, and many aspects of their fulfillment are yet future.

Eugene Merrill (p. 26) observes: “As most scholars now recognize, the covenant and its

circumstances were in the form of a royal (land) grant, a legal arrangement well attested in the ancient New East....The Abrahamic Covenant...must be viewed as an unconditional grant made by Yahweh to His servant Abram, a grant that was to serve a specific and irrevocable function.”

The Covenantal Stipulations

The Abrahamic covenant (Genesis 12:1-3) includes three major provisions: (1) *land* to Abram and Israel, (2) a *seed*, and (3) a world-wide *blessing*. A more complete breakdown of the covenant contains 14 provisions gleaned from the five major passages containing the treaty and its reconfirmations. Fruchtenbaum (p. 570) lists them as follows:

1. A great nation was to come out of Abraham, namely, the nation of Israel (12:2; 13:16; 15:5; 17:1-2,7; 22:17).
2. He was promised a land specifically, the Land of Canaan (12:1,7; 13:14-15,17; 15:17-21; 17:8).
3. Abraham himself was to be greatly blessed (12:2; 22:15-17).
4. Abraham’s name would be great (12:2).
5. Abraham would be a blessing to others (12:2).
6. Those who bless will be blessed (12:3).
7. Those who curse will be cursed (12:3).
8. In Abraham all will ultimately be blessed, a promise of Gentile blessing (12:3; 22:18).
9. Abraham would receive a son through his wife Sarah (15:1-4; 17:16-21).
10. His descendants would undergo the Egyptian bondage (15:13-14).
11. Other nations as well as Israel would come forth from Abraham (17:3-4,6; the Arab states).
12. His name would be changed from Abram to Abraham (17:5).
13. Sarai’s name was to be changed to Sarah (17:15).

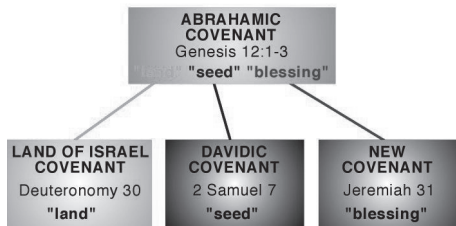
14. There was to be a token of the covenant—circumcision (17:9-14).

The Expansion of the Abrahamic Covenant

John F. Walvoord (pp. 44-45) summarizes the foundational importance of the Abrahamic covenant in the study of Bible prophecy. He states: “The Abrahamic covenant contributes to the eschatology of Israel by detailing the broad program of God as it affects Abraham’s seed....It is not too much to say that the exegesis of the Abrahamic covenant and its resulting interpretation is the foundation for the study of prophecy as a whole, not only as relating to Israel, but also for the Gentiles and the church. It is here that the true basis for premillennial interpretation of the Scriptures is found.”

The Abrahamic covenant is important to any discussion of Bible prophecy, for it expresses many unconditional decrees that will be expanded upon in subsequent revelation and thus surely fulfilled in history. This expansion of a biblical theme in the later revelation of Scripture has been called “progressive revelation.” We see this in God’s dealings with the nation and people of Israel throughout the Bible.

ABRAHAMIC COVENANT



The Bible expands upon the three provisions of *land*, *seed*, and *blessing*. (See the chart above.) God enlarges these promises with new covenants: (1) the Land of Israel covenant (Deuteronomy 30:1-10), (2) the Davidic covenant (2 Samuel 7:4-17), and (3) the New Covenant (Jeremiah 31:31-34).

Land of Israel Covenant

The first expansion of the Land promise came after Abram left Haran and arrived in the Land of Canaan. Genesis 12:7 tells us that the Lord appeared to Abram in Canaan and said, “To your descendants I will give this land.” The context shows that Abram understood the Lord to be referring to the Land of Canaan. The promise was clearly not just for Abram but for his descendants.

God further developed the Land promise just after Lot, Abram’s nephew, separated from Abram. At this time the Lord said to Abram: “Now lift up your eyes and look from the place where you are, northward and southward and eastward and westward; for all the land which you see, I will give it to you and to your descendants forever” (Genesis 13:14-15). Again the promise emphasizes that God gave the Land to Abram and his descendants. The new element introduced is one of time—it is given *forever*. Much debate has occurred over this word. Generally its duration is determined by context. Unless otherwise indicated, it clearly refers to the duration of human history and can include eternity.

Genesis 15 provides the record of the actual covenant and describes the boundaries of the Land more precisely: “On that day the Lord made a covenant with Abram, saying, ‘To your descendants I have given this land, from the river of Egypt as far as the great river, the river Euphrates’ ” (Genesis 15:18).

God promised not only to make Abram the father of a nation but also to provide a homeland for that nation. A nation cannot be a nation without a homeland of its own. Apart from its homeland a people lose their ethnic and national identity. Amazingly, Israel maintained a national identity even after 1800 years of separation from their national homeland.

Deuteronomy 30:1-10 expands this element of the Abrahamic covenant into the Land of Israel covenant (also called the Palestinian covenant). This passage teaches that all the Land promises that God has made to Israel

will be fulfilled “when all of these things have come upon you, the blessing and the curse... and you return to the LORD your God” (Deuteronomy 30:1-2). God will fulfill this promise for national Israel after the Tribulation in conjunction with the Messiah’s return and the millennial kingdom.

The Davidic Covenant

The second unconditional covenant between God and Israel was made more specifically with David. This is recorded in 2 Samuel 7:10-16. This covenant expands upon the seed provisions of the Abrahamic covenant. The Lord promises to establish David’s kingdom, house, and throne forever.

When your days are complete and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your descendant after you, who will come forth from you, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be a father to him and he will be a son to Me; when he commits iniquity, I will correct him with the rod of men and the strokes of the sons of men, but My lovingkindness shall not depart from him, as I took it away from Saul, whom I removed from before you. Your house and your kingdom shall endure before Me forever; your throne shall be established forever (2 Samuel 7:12-16).

These three words—“kingdom,” “house,” and “throne”—all refer to the political future of Israel. God has clearly promised in this covenant to make Israel an independent political entity forever. This guarantees Israel’s protection as a people and eventually as a nation. God will fulfill this promise in the messianic kingdom when the Lord Jesus Christ as the greater Son of David rules from David’s throne. This has not taken place yet but points to Israel’s future as a nation (see Ezekiel 36:1-12; Micah 4:1-5; Zephaniah 3:14-20; Zechariah 14:1-21). To interpret the future for Israel as anything other than a

unique, distinct future for God's special people would be to make God a liar and a covenant breaker.

These promises and prophecies clearly show that (1) Israel has never possessed all the land God promised, (2) God promised not to change His mind, (3) God recognized that Israel would be scattered among the nations, (4) God will return them to their Land and reunite them as a nation, and (5) Israel will serve the Lord under the Messiah in the Land in the future.

The church has never been scattered among the nations, so we cannot apply to the church the concept of being reunited. Phrases like "their own land" and "the mountains of Israel" clearly refer to the geography of the Promised Land and not to the church. Further, the context clearly indicates that God was referring to a future for ethnic, political Israel, so to say that God intended to fulfill these promises in the church would mean that God intentionally deceived Israel. God is faithful and true, so these promises do not apply to the church.

The New Covenant

The next unconditional covenant between God and Israel is the New Covenant. The covenant is new because it replaced the Old or Mosaic Covenant. Israel was unable to keep the Mosaic covenant, so God graciously promised to give them a new covenant as well as a new heart to obey God. This covenant is recorded in Jeremiah 31:31-34:

"Behold, days are coming," declares the LORD, "when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, not like the covenant which I made with their fathers in the day I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, although I was a husband to them," declares the LORD. "But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days," declares the LORD, "I will put My law within them and on their heart I will write it; and I

will be their God, and they shall be My people. They will not teach again, each man his neighbor and each man his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they will all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them," declares the LORD, "for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more."

Notice that God makes this covenant "with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah." This statement clearly refers to the ethnic nation of Israel. Second, the statement "not like the covenant which I made with their fathers in the day I took them...out of the land of Egypt" again clearly restricts the meaning of the statement to the physical descendants of Abraham through Isaac and Jacob. Third, this covenant has in view a future restoration of the people not only as God's people but as a people who were forgiven, regenerated, and serving the Lord.

When the Lord Jesus Christ went to the cross, He established the New Covenant. We remember that in the celebration of the Lord's table, Christ said, "This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in My blood" (Luke 22:20). The New Testament clearly teaches that the church is a beneficiary of the spiritual benefits of the New Covenant because of its relationship to Christ.

The covenants that God made with Israel in the Old Testament promised that Israel would have an eternal kingdom in the location of the Land God promised to Abraham. While God warned them time and again that because of their disobedience they would be removed from the Land, at the same time He promised that He would restore them to the Land as His people under the rule of the Messiah, and they would serve Him. Israel has never completely controlled the land God promised, and they have never returned to the Land under the conditions of the covenant, so the Old Testament promises and prophecies clearly foretold a future for Israel as an ethnic, political entity with a special status as God's people. This will be fulfilled when Israel submits to God spiritually.

Permanence of the Abrahamic Covenant

The Abrahamic covenant is directed to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and their descendants. It is repeated to them about 20 times in Genesis (12:1-3,7-9; 13:14-18; 15:1-18; 17:1-27; 22:15-18; 26:2-6,24-25; 27:28-29,38-40; 28:1-4,10-22; 31:3,11-13; 32:24-32; 35:9-15; 48:3-4,10-20; 49:1-28; 50:23-25). The Abrahamic covenant has been in force throughout the years and is still a basis upon which God acts, even in our own day. Genesis 12–50 records the beginning of the historical outworking of the Abrahamic covenant. When people bless Abraham and his descendants, God blesses them. When people curse Abraham and his descendants, God curses them. The outworking of the Abrahamic covenant continues throughout the rest of the Old Testament.

Scripture demonstrates God's integrity in history through His relationship with His chosen people Israel. As He promised in the Abrahamic covenant, God uses His dealings with Israel to leave His mark throughout history. Through Israel God gave His law, founded a nation, caused His presence to dwell among them, mediated His Word, and sent the Savior of the world. Through Israel God will work to preach the gospel throughout the whole world, invoke the second coming, and reign for a thousand years in Jerusalem, the place of His eternal glory. Without Israel, the second coming cannot take place, since the nation must be present for this glorious event to occur. Thus, God's promise to Israel is that they have an eternal permanence in history and throughout eternity (Jeremiah 31:35-36).

Thus says the LORD, who gives the sun for light by day and the fixed order of the moon and the stars for light by night, who stirs up the sea so that its waves roar; the LORD of hosts is His name: "If this fixed order departs from before Me," declares the LORD, "Then the offspring of Israel also will cease from being a nation before Me forever." Thus says the LORD, "If the

heavens above can be measured and the foundations of the earth searched out below, then I will also cast off all the offspring of Israel for all that they have done," declares the LORD.

The Abrahamic covenant is the springboard through which every promise of blessing originates, whether to the Jews, the Gentiles, or the church of God. Just because God's promises have a wide-ranging scope does not mean that promises He made to Israel are not permanent and will not be kept. The force of the Abrahamic covenant is still in place today. God still blesses those who bless Israel and curses those who curse Israel. These promises will come to a climax during the events of the tribulation period, leading up to the second coming of Christ and His glorious reign from Jerusalem for 1000 years.

—THOMAS ICE

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Acts, Eschatology of

The book of Acts is a pivotal book in the New Testament. It records the transition from the Old Testament and the Gospels to the epistles, from a focus on Israel as God's chosen nation to the church—people whom God has chosen from all nations.

When Will God's Kingdom Come?

Acts 1:6-7 reveals that the apostles are expecting Jesus to fulfill the many prophecies

of the Old Testament by establishing His kingdom on earth. Here they are anticipating neither heaven nor the church. Their words are definitive: “Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?” (NKJV). The word “restore” (Greek, *apokathistanō*) suggests four things:

1. The kingdom to which they are referring is that which Israel had at one time possessed. Israel became God’s kingdom when they came out of Egypt as a nation (Exodus 19:6), and God was their King (1 Samuel 8:6-7; 12:12; Judges 8:23; Isaiah 43:15; Hosea 13:9-11).
2. This kingdom did not now exist at the time of this question by the disciples.
3. This kingdom will again exist with the nation of Israel.
4. This kingdom is the same kingdom that had been established with Israel, for “restore” means to bring back that which formerly existed.

Jesus mildly rebuked His disciples for their question, but He did not rebuke them for still anticipating the restoration of the earthly kingdom that God had established with the nation of Israel. He only rebuked them for making Israel’s kingdom their present and primary concern. Christ’s concern for that time was the establishment of His church (Acts 1:8). His admonition to the disciples that it is not for them to know the times or seasons (verse 7) may also be a warning for us not to speculate and theorize too much about future things that God has not chosen to reveal.

The Ascension and Second Coming of Jesus Christ

The ascension of Jesus to the Father in heaven is significantly different from what had been occurring during the 40 days between His resurrection and ascension (Acts 1:9-11). On the former occasions He had instantly appeared and disappeared (Luke 24:31) and then reappeared on a later

occasion. What happens here is different and final—their eyes behold His gradual ascension until a cloud obscures Him from their sight. This cloud may symbolize the shekinah glory and presence of God seen in the Old Testament (Exodus 40:34) and manifested on the Mount of Transfiguration (Matthew 17:5). While the apostles are entranced in the event, two “men” appear on the scene. That they are angels is evident by several facts.

1. Their white clothing fits that of angelic appearances (Matthew 28:3; John 20:12).
2. Their message fits that of angelic announcements (Matthew 28:5-7).
3. Angels are often described as men (Acts 10:3,30; Revelation 21:17).
4. Even the use of the rare pluperfect verb (*pareistēkeisan*—“stood”) suggests a dramatic event (see Harrison, 41).

These two angels assure the apostles that Jesus will return in the same manner as He has just ascended.

1. He ascended visibly; He will return visibly (see Revelation 1:7).
2. He ascended bodily; He will return bodily to this very place—Mt. Olivet (Zechariah 14:4).
3. He ascended in the cloud of glory; He will return in the cloud of glory (Matthew 24:30; Mark 13:26).

Jesus’ return has not yet happened and will not happen until the time when the Great Tribulation has come upon Israel and the whole earth (Matthew 24:29-30).

The Fulfillment of the Prophet Joel

Peter seems to be saying in Acts 2:17-21 that Pentecost is the fulfillment of Joel’s prophecy concerning the last days (Joel 2:28-32). But Joel quite clearly relates these events to the time of the Great Tribulation, for Joel, immediately after 2:32, states, “For behold, in those days and at that time...” and then goes on to describe the time of the Great

Tribulation (3:9-16) and the kingdom of God on earth (3:18-21). So can Peter be seeing the fulfillment of Joel 2 on the Day of Pentecost? No, nor can he imagine its fulfillment. He has not seen the Spirit poured out on *all* flesh. When he preached this, he had just seen the Spirit poured out on only 120 people (Acts 1:15). But this is enough to convince him that this is the beginning, the first phase, of that fulfillment (Bruce, p. 61).

The Return of Jesus and Restoration of All Things

If someone imagines that Peter was confused and spiritually dull when he asked Jesus about the restoration of the kingdom to Israel in Acts 1:6 prior to Pentecost and the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit, then one can expect that after Pentecost, Peter's understanding should be much clearer. Yet in Acts 3:19-26, Peter's understanding of God's kingdom with Israel remains unchanged.

Peter says that Israel needs to repent and to turn to Jesus so that God may send Jesus back from heaven in order to bring the times of restoration and refreshing, the times proclaimed by all the Old Testament prophets (verse 21). The Greek noun translated "restoration" here is from the same root as the verb used in the apostles' question in Acts 1:6 concerning God restoring His kingdom to Israel at that time.

Peter rightly believes that God will restore His kingdom with Israel when Jesus literally returns from heaven to this earth (Matthew 25:31-32; Revelation 19:11-20:6) and that the nation of Israel must first repent (see Romans 11, especially verses 25-27; Zechariah 12:10-14; 13:8-9). Peter mentions two important points of eschatology in this sermon. On the positive side, Jesus will return and restore all that God had promised and Israel had lost. And on the negative side, those who do not hear and heed Jesus will be completely cut off from these millennial blessings (Fernando, p. 140).

Amos' Kingdom Prophecy and the Early Church

At the Jerusalem Council of Acts 15, James, the pastor at Jerusalem, quotes the Old Testament prophet Amos (9:11-12) to show that the salvation of many Gentiles during the days of the early church should not be surprising because the Old Testament prophets foretold it (Acts 15:15-17). Amos proclaims that these Gentiles will enter into God's kingdom. This leads some to believe that the church, therefore, is the fulfillment of the Old Testament promise of the kingdom of God.

James, however, does not say that Amos' prophecy is being fulfilled during his time in the early church. In fact, the evidence shows that James is saying that the prophecy will not be fulfilled until a later time, when Jesus returns to earth after this present age.

First, James says that "the words of the prophets *agree*" with what is happening in the early church (Acts 15:15). What God will do in the future millennial kingdom, that is, saving and including many Gentiles, He is already doing in the early church. James has carefully chosen the word "agree" rather than "fulfill." The conversion of Gentiles in the days of the early church is not the fulfillment of this Old Testament prophecy, but it is in harmony with what God will also do in His kingdom—He will include all nations.

Second, James changes the words of the Amos prophecy from "on that day" to "after this" to show that he understands that the prophecy refers to a time "after this" time of the first century. It refers to the time of the future millennial era.

Third, James adds the word "return" in his citation of this prophecy to allow for the fact that before Amos' prophecy will be fulfilled, Christ must come a second time to earth to restore His kingdom. James says, "*After this* I will *return* and will rebuild the tabernacle of David, which has fallen down. I will rebuild its ruins, and I will set it up; so that the rest of mankind may seek the Lord, even all the Gentiles who are called by My name, says the Lord who does all these things" (Acts 15:16-

17). These two changes are not due to textual variations, as some propose, but due to James' interpretation.

Therefore, James bears witness to the fact that the church is not the promised kingdom but that this kingdom follows ("after this") this present church age.

The Resurrection and Judgment of All People

In his address at Athens, Paul announced that the God who is creator of all is also judge of all. He has even fixed the day and appointed the Judge (Acts 17:30-32). The resurrection of this Judge, Jesus Christ, provides assurance that this judgment will occur. The first-century Athenians found it untenable to accept the notion of a physical resurrection because Neo-platonic philosophy regarded the physical realm as innately evil. Why would God raise man physically from death? Man, they thought, would live on only as a spirit. Yet Paul boldly proclaimed this eschatological resurrection and judgment as a central theme of the Christian gospel.

A New Dispensation

The book of Acts provides numerous examples of the dispensational transition from the Old Testament to the New Testament. For example, baptism is no longer a Jewish ritual but a distinctively Christian experience (Acts 19:1-5). Old Testament dietary laws are no longer applicable in the New Testament church (Acts 10:1-16). Gentile converts begin to outnumber Jewish converts as Jesus' prediction that He will build His church (Matthew 16:18) begins to come to pass and the gospel spreads to the "uttermost parts of the world" (Acts 1:8).

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Ages of Time

An important biblical phrase in Bible prophecy is "the age to come." An understanding of a related term, "the present age," is also necessary for properly interpreting biblical prophecy. "The present age" refers to the current church age that began almost 2000 years ago on the Day of Pentecost when the church was founded. It will end with the rapture of the church. "The age to come" is a reference to the millennial kingdom that will commence with the second coming of Christ and continue for 1000 years (Revelation 20:3).

The Misunderstanding

Many amillennialists, postmillennialists, and preterists believe that "the age to come" refers to the current age in which we now live. Some say this began at Christ's first coming, while others say it began at Christ's supposed return in A.D. 70. Gary DeMar (pp. 69-70) says,

The "end of the age" refers to the end of the Old Covenant redemption system with its attendant sacrifices and rituals.... The "end of the age" refers to the termination of the exclusive Jewish entitlement to the covenant promises and the inclusion of the Gentiles into the blessings of the covenant and the privileges of the gospel and kingdom (Matthew 21:41,43; 22:10). "End of the age" is a covenantal phrase. With the temple destroyed, there would be no way and no need to carry out the rigorous demands of the sacrificial system, a system that was predestined to