

Does Acts 28:28 signal a change in God's dealings with mankind? Yes...and no.

By Darren Smith - Originally Published: 6/2/2016 Last Updated: 6/2/2016

As Luke, the writer of the book of Acts, brings his written historical testimony to an end in what we know as Acts Chapter 28, he relates the account of a third incident in which Jewish leaders rejected the Apostle Paul's message, a rejection that prompted Paul to state he would take his God-given message to the Gentiles. The first time that Jewish leaders rejected Paul's message and elicited such a response was in Acts 13:45-47. This was in Pisidian Antioch:

ACTS 13

⁴⁵But when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with envy, and spake against those things which were spoken by Paul, contradicting and blaspheming. ⁴⁶Then Paul and Barnabas waxed bold, and said, It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you: but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles. ⁴⁷For so hath the Lord commanded us, *saying*, I have set thee to be a light of the Gentiles, that thou shouldest be for salvation unto the ends of the earth.

The second time the Jews rejected Paul's message and brought forth this type of response was in Acts 18:5-6. That was in Corinth:

ACTS 18

⁵And when Silas and Timotheus were come from Macedonia, Paul was pressed in the spirit, and testified to the Jews *that Jesus was Christ*. ⁶And when they opposed themselves, and blasphemed, he shook *his* raiment, and said unto them, Your blood *be* upon your own heads; *I am* clean: from henceforth I will go unto the Gentiles.

Finally, as mentioned above, the third (and last) recorded rejection of Paul's message by Jewish leaders was in Acts 28, prompting the final declaration that the Gospel was going to the Gentiles. This was in the city of Rome:

ACTS 28

²⁴And some [Jews] believed the things which were spoken [by Paul], and some believed not. ²⁵And when they agreed not among themselves, they departed, after that Paul had spoken one word, Well spake the Holy Ghost by Esaias the prophet unto our fathers, ²⁶Saying, Go unto this people, and say, Hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and not perceive: ²⁷For the heart of this people is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes have they closed; lest they should see with *their* eyes, and hear with *their* ears, and understand with *their* heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them. ²⁸Be it known therefore unto you, that the salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles, and *that* they will hear it.

Three short verses after Paul's final declaration against the Jews in Rome, the book of Acts closes. And with the very last, closing verse of the book of Acts, we see Paul's statement in Acts 28:28 coming true! In that verse, we see the Apostle Paul teaching his God-given message "**with all confidence, no man forbidding him**" (Acts 28:31). And, since the Jews had already turned away from Paul in that city...and Paul had clearly stated he would turn to the "Gentiles," we must assume that it is the **Gentiles** "hearing" the message in Acts 28:31...just as Paul declared they would!

While the book of Acts opens with the Word of the Lord going forth to the Jews in Jerusalem, the capital city of the Jews, we find the book of Acts closing with the Word of the Lord going to the Gentiles in Rome, the capital city of the Gentiles. While the God-given message of the Kingdom is met with rejection, persecution, and violence from the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem (and, later, met with rejection by the Jewish leaders in Antioch, Corinth, and Rome), Paul is able to teach without resistance from Gentile leaders in Rome, teaching "with all confidence, no man forbidding him!" What a tragic testimony against the chosen nation of Israel!

The Jews' ears were indeed "dull of hearing" and "their eyes were closed." They did not "understand with their heart" and were not "healed." Subsequently, the "salvation of God" was sent instead to the Gentiles...and they, in contrast to the Jews, were "hearing it!" This is the sad, overarching, overwhelming narrative of the book of Acts.

It is obvious, then, this third and final pronouncement against the Jews here in Acts 28 is extremely significant. While there is no doubt a wealth of truth that can be gleaned from an in-depth study of each of the critical passages we have quoted from the book of Acts, that would go way beyond the purpose of this brief paper. The very basic question we would like to address in this paper is this: Does this **final** pronouncement against the Jews, detailed in Acts 28:28, signal a change in God's dealings with mankind?

Those familiar with studying the Scriptures from a Dispensational approach are most likely familiar with a position commonly called the "Acts 28 position." The basic premise of this position is that the final pronouncement against Israel in Acts 28:28 completely changes how God deals with mankind after that event. While no short synopsis of an in-depth doctrine such as the "Acts 28 position" can possibly do it proper justice, I will list just a few of the basic principles of the teaching, the ones which I hope to address in this particular study:

The "Acts 28 position" asserts (among other things) that the final pronouncement by Paul against Israel in Acts 28:28 is:

- ...the end (albeit temporary) of one gospel message (the "gospel of the Kingdom" sent primarily to Israel) and the beginning of another gospel message (called the "Gospel of the Grace of God" and sent primarily to the Gentiles).
- ...the end (again, temporary) of one hope (the entrance into the Kingdom of Messiah upon the earth through the Lord's return or through the resurrection at that return) and the beginning of another hope (a destination "in the heavenly places").
- ...the (temporary) end of the Jews' Kingdom church and the beginning of a new church, called the Body of Christ. The Church which is the Body of Christ, according to those who hold the "Acts 28" position, did not exist until after Acts 28:28.

Because those associated with the “Acts 28 position” see these specific ramifications in regard to the final pronouncement made by Paul, they of necessity have to split the epistles which Paul wrote into two categories: They assert that the epistles written prior to Acts 28 (such as Romans, the Corinthian epistles, Galatians, and the Thessalonian epistles) were written under that Kingdom message to Israel and do not directly apply to us today. They would also assert that only Paul’s prison epistles (such as Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and 2 Timothy) are written about the Body of Christ and about the new “heavenly hope.” They would affirm that only these “post Acts 28” letters from Paul are directly applicable to us Gentiles today.

To begin this discussion about Acts 28:28, it must be conceded, from even a very basic reading of the passage, that there is some very tangible merit to the idea that real, viable change happens at the historical moment this verse describes. It is not only the third time in Scripture we have God’s message of the Kingdom presented to the leadership of the Jews who have been dispersed among the nations, it is also the last recorded time in Scripture we have the message presented to Jewish leaders. It paints a vivid picture that, just as the Jewish leaders “struck out” in their opportunity to claim the literal Kingdom of God in Jerusalem, so the Jewish leaders dispersed among the nations all over the world also “struck out!”

It is also critical to note that it is only the Acts 28 account of the condemnation of Israel’s leaders where Paul says “the Gentiles will listen.” This phrase, not present in the first two indictments Paul spoke against Israel, and combined with the fact that it is the third such pronouncement, signals a very special significance to this particular indictment against the chosen nation. And, as already noted, shortly after the account of this third condemnation of Israel’s leaders, we receive clear testimony that the Gentiles do “listen” to the Word of the Lord from Paul. It is then, with this important testimony established, Luke closes his historical account.

The book of Acts closes concluding that the Jews – not just at Jerusalem, but all over the world – will not receive the Word of the Lord. However, wonder of wonders, the narrative shows that the Gentiles will! It is an absolutely undeniable theme that runs through the entire storyline of Paul’s ministry in Acts.

If, then, it is concluded that the Jews – no matter where they are in the world - will not receive the Word of the Lord from Paul, we need to think about the ramifications of that rejection. And the context of all the Scriptures leading up to that critical point in Acts 28 will help us put everything into a proper perspective...

Consider a very “big picture” view of what was going on up until that critical moment in Acts 28: There was an emphatic message which began with the coming of John the Baptist, continued throughout the ministry of Christ, and was renewed in the early chapters of the book of Acts. That plain message was that the “Kingdom of Heaven” was “at hand.” This Kingdom being proclaimed was the literal Kingdom of the promised Messiah on the earth with the nation of Israel serving as the Messiah’s (the King’s) priests. Naturally, then, this message had to go forth first and foremost to the nation of Israel who were to be (as prophesied) the priests in that kingdom. One of the things this “nation of priests” had to be endowed with was the ability to communicate to the Gentiles, to whom they were to be a light. Consistent with that concept, the Israelites were endowed with the ability to speak other (Gentile) languages in the early chapters of the book of Acts.

Another critical characteristic of this future Kingdom upon the earth will be long life, the eradication of the effects of disease and sickness. The supernatural endowment of the gift of healing upon believers during the Gospels and the book of Acts signaled the reality of the nearness of that Kingdom of Heaven coming upon the earth.

Doesn't, then, the rejection of this message by the "Kingdom of Priests" have serious ramifications? If those who were to be the "light to the Gentiles" have refused that light themselves, does that not drastically affect whether that Kingdom can appear on the earth exactly as it was described in the Old Testament Scriptures?

Can you have the Kingdom of Heaven upon the earth, the one foretold in the Old Testament, without the Jews accepting their Messiah and being the priests of that King? The answer is No! Can you have the Kingdom of Heaven on the earth, the one foretold in the Old Testament, without the Jews being a light unto the Gentiles? No! Not at all!

So, without doubt, those that hold to the "Acts 28" position have some real merit to their position! Does, then, Acts 28:28 signal a change in God's dealings with mankind? Absolutely "Yes!" Without Israel's acceptance of their Messiah, there is no Kingdom of heaven on the earth! Without Israel being a Kingdom of Priests, there is no Kingdom of heaven on the earth! Without Israel being the light to the Gentiles in regard to their Messiah, there is no Kingdom of heaven on the earth!

All day long the Lord held out his hands to a disobedient and gainsaying people. He held forth the message to the Jews first through John the Baptist and then through the Lord Jesus and His twelve apostles throughout all Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and Galilee. That message was met with complete rejection and brutal executions by beheading (John) and by crucifixion (Christ).

Then, in an act of total grace and forgiveness (related to Luke 23:34a), the message of the Kingdom went forth once again through Peter and the eleven in the city of Jerusalem, which is to be the capital city of that future Kingdom. Once again, the message was met with rejection and, ultimately, executions, this time by stoning (Stephen) and by the sword (James).

But was it only the local Jews in Jerusalem who would not have Jesus of Nazareth rule over them? Would the Jews who were dispersed among the nations receive the message from God, even if the Jews in Jerusalem would not? This was a question that God, in His sovereignty, would not leave unanswered. We find clear testimony throughout the ministry of Paul that this rejection of God's message to the chosen nation was not just a rejection by those specific Jews in the holy city...

The word of God continued to go forth to the Jew through Paul and, in the cities of Antioch, Corinth, and Rome, the Jew continued to show that, from no matter what part of the world they resided, the Jews would not have this Messiah, this Jesus, to rule over them. The overarching message from the Jewish nation was very clear...and it was clear from all over the world.

It is completely logical, then, that while the message of this glorious Kingdom of Heaven on the earth was being proclaimed to the Jewish leaders of that era, the characteristics of the Kingdom (such as the sign gifts) were still very much active. Testimony to this fact is very clear.

During the Lord Jesus' earthly ministry, miracles and healings were a constant testimony to Israel. After the Lord's resurrection, in the early chapters of the book of Acts, Peter and the Lord's other followers continued exhibit those Kingdom signs to the Jewish nation. And, during the ministry of the Apostle Paul from Acts 13 all the way through Acts 28, we have the signs of the Kingdom of Heaven on the earth bearing further testimony to the nation of Israel. That is because, as Paul writes, the "Jews demand a sign" (1 Cor. 1:22).

After Acts 28, after it is clear that the Jews *of every nation* would reject the Kingdom message just as the Jerusalem Jews had rejected it, we find that Paul could apparently no longer heal others, such as his own "son in the gospel," Timothy (see 1 Timothy 5:23). After Acts 28, Paul apparently could no longer heal his friend Trophimus (2 Tim. 4:20). And, after Acts 28, in his prison epistles, Paul no longer mentions the miraculous signs of the Kingdom, such as the gift of tongues, the gift of the interpretation of tongues, or the gift of healing (see Eph. 4:11-12). This was also an indication that the signs designed for the Kingdom of God upon the earth had been withdrawn. An examination of all of the epistles written by Paul clearly bear this out:

**Before the statement in Acts 28:28
(in Paul's earlier/pre-prison letters)**

Signs Gifts of the Kingdom were active...

Gift of Wisdom / Knowledge

(1 Cor. 12:8)

Gift of Faith (1 Cor. 12:9a) *¹

Gift of Healing (1 Cor. 12:9b, 28, 30, see also James 5:14-15, written before Acts 28)

Gift of Miracles (1 Cor. 12:10a, 28, 29)

Gift of Prophecy (1 Cor. 12:10b, 28)

Gift of Discerning of Spirits

(1 Cor. 12:10c)

Gift of Tongues (1 Cor. 12:10d, 28, 30)

Gift of Interpretation of Tongues

(1 Cor. 12:10e, 30)

Paul could heal and even raise the dead

(Acts 14:8-11, 19:11-12, 20:9-12, 28:8-9)

**After the statement in Acts 28:28
(in Paul's later/prison letters)**

Signs gifts of the Kingdom are absent...

Wisdom/ Knowledge not listed as gift

(Eph. 4:11-12)

Faith not listed as a gift (Eph. 4:11-12) *²

Healing not listed with gifts (Eph. 4:11-12, see also 1 Tim. 5:23, 2 Tim. 4:20)

Miracles not listed with gifts (Eph. 4:11-12)

Prophecy not listed with gifts (Eph. 4:11-12)

Discerning of Spirits not listed with gifts

(Eph. 4:11-12)

Tongues not listed with gifts (Eph. 4:11-12)

Interpretation of Tongues not listed with

gifts (Eph. 4:11-12)

Paul could no longer heal his friends, even of

basic illnesses (1 Tim. 5:23, 2 Tim. 4:20)

Without a doubt, the sign gifts are different prior to Acts 28 when compared to the recorded time period after Acts 28. They are active and working among those of faith before Acts 28, yet completely absent from the record after Acts 28. Without doubt, a change took place...and it had to be related to the chosen nation's rejection of the Kingdom message, a message with which those signs were associated.

So, what has to be our response to the question about whether Acts 28 signals a change in God's dealings with mankind? We would have to answer "Yes, it did!" After Acts 28, God is no longer going to the "Jew first," testifying to this Kingdom, as he previously did. After Acts 28:28, God has turned to the Gentiles...and it was recorded that the Gentiles were listening.

Prior to Acts 28, the signs of the future Kingdom of heaven abounded, shouting a clear testimony to the Jews – the Jews all over the world – that the Kingdom of heaven was within their grasp. After Acts 28, however, we see no more signs that the earthly Kingdom is near. Sickness can

once again prevail on the believer's dearest friends (such as the Apostle Paul's friends Timothy and Trophimus). Supernatural endowment of languages to communicate that Kingdom message are no longer mentioned in Paul's later epistles. And the light goes forth the Gentiles without the channel through whom that Kingdom message was supposed to come (Israel).

Are we, then, to embrace the teachings of the "Acts 28 position?" We began this brief study with the question, "Does Acts 28:28 signal a change in God's dealings with mankind?" And, as we have seen, the obvious answer to this question is "Yes!" It does signal a change! *Relating to the concepts that we have addressed about Israel's privilege and the signs signaling the coming of the Kingdom of God on the earth*, there can be no doubt that those who hold the Acts 28 position are absolutely correct. God changed the plan. You can accurately assess that God withdrew the offer of the Kingdom of God on the earth during that time. The messages to Israel's leaders about the Kingdom stopped. The signs associated with that Kingdom stopped.

Do I, then, embrace the complete "Acts 28 position?" My answer has to be - at this time - no, I do not...

Remember, one of the core components of the "Acts 28" position is that the message of God to mankind and the hope that God was setting forth to mankind changed when Paul made his final pronouncement against the Jewish leaders in Acts 28:28. They also affirm a new church began at that time, the church called "the Body of Christ."

Yes, as we have seen from the above study, God's dealings *with Israel* certainly changed at this critical juncture and that change had a major effect on all of mankind. After this critical point, God would turn away from Israel. After this critical point, God would no longer send forth miraculous gifts as a sign of the Kingdom. But the most drastic effect upon mankind was that the implementation of the Kingdom was obviously postponed to some future time. The Kingdom of God was not ushered in! That Kingdom never became a reality!

But did *everything* change? Did all of God's dealings with mankind change at Acts 28:28? While the audience for Paul's God-given message certainly changed (he no longer went to the Jews after this), did Paul's *message* change? Was the message he set forth *to the Gentiles* a different message? Did the hope set forth by God to mankind change? Did God form a new body of believers after Acts 28 with a *different goal* and *different destination in which to hope*?

Expanding our original question in this way can expand the discussion to topics that are extremely broad and very far reaching, such as the overall purpose of the Apostle Paul's ministry and the definition of the mystery of Christ which Paul was sent to preach. While the chosen topic of this paper will almost always lead to discussions of these related subjects, addressing those topics in depth at this point would be beyond this paper's singular focus on Acts 28:28 as a changing point in God dealing with mankind. My approach with this paper - and with other papers as well - will be to address one single Bible teaching at a time.

Yes, at the conclusion of this article, I will refer the reader to other writings on these broader topics for further study relating to the "Acts 28 position" and to the overall ministry and purpose of the Apostle Paul. However, to address the basic question set forth in the title of this document, I believe the best approach is to clearly answer the question stated in this paper...by simply using the specific Scripture in question. This will not only answer the question set forth in this particular paper, but also serve as a springboard for further studies.

So, while the Lord's offer to implement the Kingdom of God through Israel changed at Acts 28:28 (signaled by the specific words of Paul and the clear withdrawal of the pertinent signs of the Kingdom), did God's *message* to the Gentiles change? Did the *hope* God offered mankind change? What does Acts 28 itself say?

ACTS 28

²⁴And some [Jews] believed the things which were spoken [by Paul], and some believed not. ²⁵And when they agreed not among themselves, they departed, after that Paul had spoken one word, Well spake the Holy Ghost by Esaias the prophet unto our fathers, ²⁶Saying, Go unto this people, and say, Hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and not perceive: ²⁷For the heart of this people is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes have they closed; lest they should see with *their* eyes, and hear with *their* ears, and understand with *their* heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them. ²⁸Be it known therefore unto you, that the salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles, and *that* they will hear it.

This is our focus for the moment: Did the statement against the Jews in verse 28 change Paul's message...to the Gentiles? The reason that this is such a critical question is this: if Paul's message – Paul's gospel - did not change at this point in time, then it certainly stands to reason that the hope associated with his message did not change! And – if Paul's message of hope did not change at this particular point in time – then a new “Body of Christ” cannot have started at Acts 28:28 because all those who had believed Paul's consistent message before Acts 28:28 would already be a part of the Body of Christ! If Paul's message did not change at Acts 28:28, Paul continued to add new converts to the hope he had already established prior to that point!

The critical verse here is Acts 28:28. This verse is labeled as a “dispensational landmark” by most who hold to the “Acts 28 position” and a primary proponent of this position asserts very clearly that the words of Acts 28:28 “usher in a whole new dispensation.”³

ACTS 28

²⁸Be it known therefore unto you, that the salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles, and *that* they will hear it.

So, the logical question becomes: If this verse is where the change happens, what was Paul teaching prior to this verse? What was the hope Paul was preaching prior to Acts 28:28? We only have to move up five short verses for the answer:

ACTS 28

²³And when they had appointed him [Paul] a day, there came many to him into *his* lodging; to whom he expounded and testified the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus, both out of the law of Moses, and *out of* the prophets, from morning till evening.

This passage could not be more plain! What was Paul teaching prior to the significant pronouncement against Israel in Acts 28:28? He was teaching about the “Kingdom of God!” And, lest there be any confusion about this phrase, “the kingdom of God,” the context makes it clear that Paul is teaching about the prophesied Kingdom of God upon the earth, the one foretold in the “law of Moses” and in “the prophets.” For, as Paul taught the Jews about the Kingdom of

God, he persuaded them from the “law of Moses” and from “the prophets,” using certain passages in those Scriptures to show that Jesus of Nazareth was indeed the King (Messiah) of that Kingdom of which Moses and prophets foretold! This was Paul’s message! Paul was teaching the “Kingdom of God” upon the earth – and Christ as it’s long prophesied King as the hope for mankind - just *as Moses and the prophets described that Kingdom...and that King.*

Another way Paul describes the hope he was setting forth is in Acts 28:20. Paul says that it was “for the hope of Israel” he was bound. It was “the hope of Israel” that Paul was teaching and for which he was being persecuted by the Jews! Paul was teaching Israel’s hope, the hope of the realization of the Kingdom of heaven upon the earth, the kingdom foretold by “the law of Moses” and the kingdom foretold by “the prophets.” The Israelites hoped for entrance into this Kingdom by resurrection or by the coming of the Messiah. The critical component the Jews were missing was the true identity of this “King” belonging to the hope of that Kingdom! Thus, Paul taught them about Jesus from “Moses” and from “the prophets.” This, in summary, was the message, the hope of the “Kingdom,” which was wrapped up in the true identity of it’s promised King! And this message cannot be stated more clearly than in Acts 28:23!

Now, to finally address our question, did Paul’s message to the Gentiles change after the pronouncement was made against Israel in Acts 28:28? The answer is extremely clear in verses 30 and 31:

ACTS 28

³⁰And Paul dwelt two whole years in his own hired house, and received all that came in unto him, ³¹Preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ, with all confidence, no man forbidding him.

The answer is “No!” Paul’s *message* did NOT change after Acts 28:28!

Before the final pronouncement made against Israel in Acts 28:28, Paul is teaching the “Kingdom of God” (Acts 28:23). After the final pronouncement is made against Israel, Paul is teaching “the kingdom of God” (Acts 28:31). Does this sound like Paul’s message changed at all? No! Does it sound like the hope he was setting forth to those hearing him changed at all? No! Not at all!

The exact words used here by Luke are extremely critical to this discussion. While those to whom the message was being delivered certainly changed, does it sound like – from the exact text of Acts 28 – that Paul’s core message changed? Does it sound like the hope Paul was setting forth changed? No!

The “Kingdom of God” is the message! Before the final indictment against Israel, the message is the “Kingdom of God!” After the final indictment against Israel, the message is the “Kingdom of God!” This is as clear as can be!

Yes, certainly, the Kingdom was no longer “at hand” after Acts 28:28. The Kingdom was obviously postponed by God to some point still in the future. We can see that by a comparison of the pre-prison letters and the prison letters by Paul. But did Paul teach a different hope to the Gentiles when he began to receive them in his hired house following the Roman Jews’ rejection of his message? No! The Scripture is plain! For at least two entire years, Paul taught the

“Kingdom of God” to those Gentiles! So, what was the hope he was setting forth to those Gentiles who came to his hired house? The “Kingdom of God!”

There is much more that could be addressed in other Scriptures about the Apostle Paul’s message about the Kingdom, but exact text of Acts Chapter 28 provides the very clear answer to the basic question set forth in this paper. One does not have to go very far from Acts 28:28 to see that Paul’s message did not change after the critical third pronouncement against the nation of Israel. Paul’s message of hope was the “Kingdom of God” before Israel’s final rejection...and Paul’s message of hope was the “Kingdom of God” after Israel’s final rejection. This is what the text of Acts Chapter 28 teaches.

So, did God’s dealings with mankind change after Acts 28:28? Yes they did, in relation to the offer of the Kingdom to the Jews and the resulting postponement of the Kingdom which affected all mankind. But did God’s dealings with mankind change in relation to what the Lord was setting forth as an offer to mankind, an offer that from that time on would only go to the Gentiles? No, the offer to mankind did not change! God sent forth a message of hope to the Gentiles in regard to the very same “Kingdom of God” he had offered to the Jews!

Are all these events not consistent with what the Lord Jesus himself taught about the “Kingdom of God?” When the Lord Jesus described what the “Kingdom of God” was like, did He not say that it was like a great banquet being ready and those who were to join Him at that great banquet (the chosen nation of Israel) would be invited? It was a resounding, clear call which began with John the Baptist and continued throughout the ministry of the Lord Jesus and His disciples. “Come, Israel, the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand!”

LUKE 14

¹⁵And...[Jesus] said...Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the kingdom of God. ¹⁶Then said he...A certain man made a great supper, and bade many: ¹⁷And sent his servant at supper time to say to them that were bidden, Come; for all things are now ready.

But, in the Lord’s story, those who were invited to the great feast of the Kingdom would not come! The excuses abounded...

LUKE 14

¹⁸And they all with one *consent* began to make excuse. The first said unto him, I have bought a piece of ground, and I must needs go and see it: I pray thee have me excused. ¹⁹And another said, I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to prove them: I pray thee have me excused. ²⁰And another said, I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come. ²¹So that servant came, and showed his lord these things.

John the Baptist and, then, the Lord Jesus had come to Israel and told them that the “supper” was ready, that the “Kingdom of Heaven” was at hand! The people of Israel were the people to whom the invitations “to supper” were to be sent, because they are the ones with the privilege of being the chosen nation! It was long prophesied that it will be Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob who will sit down with the Lord in the great feast of the Kingdom (Matt. 8:11). Those patriarchs and their descendants were to be the “nation of Priests” in that Kingdom (Ex. 19:6). That is why the message went forth only to the nation of Israel in the gospel accounts (Matt. 15:24)! But those who were invited would not accept the Lord’s invitation!

What, then, was the Lord's reaction to these rejected invitations?

LUKE 14

²¹...Then the master of the house being angry said to his servant, Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in hither the poor, and the maimed, and the halt, and the blind.

Was it not the sick, the diseased, and the outcasts in Israel who accepted the invitation of the Kingdom? Was it not those individuals who were willing to receive our Lord? In Matt. 21:31, Jesus told the Chief Priests and elders (i.e., the leaders of Israel) that "the publicans and harlots [were going] into the Kingdom" before them! So it is the same concept in this story the Lord told in Luke 14 about the "Kingdom of God!" The privileged ones (the leaders of the nation of Israel) who received this special invitation rejected it, prompting the invitations to go out to the outcasts, the poor, the maimed, the halt, and the blind! And, consistent with the parable about the "Kingdom of God" in Luke 14, it was the outcasts of Israel who received the message! The message, in the parable, was to go forth to the outcasts "of the city" and, in historical reality, it went forth to the outcasts in the nation of Israel! This is very consistent with our Lord's words!

However, the key point in bringing up this parable the Lord Jesus told about the "Kingdom of God" in Luke 14 is the last part of that story...

LUKE 14

²²And the servant said, Lord, it is done as thou hast commanded [i.e., the poor, the maimed, the halt and the blind have been invited to the supper], and yet there is room.

This is critical: what does the Lord do at this point?

LUKE 14

²³And the lord said unto the servant, Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel *them* to come in, that my house may be filled. ²⁴For I say unto you, That none of those men which were bidden shall taste of my supper.

The message obviously did go out to others beyond the geographic nation of Israel. And who carried that message? Was it not Paul? Was it not Paul who expounded the "Kingdom of God," all over the world, always teaching that message to the "Jew first?" Was it not Paul who was fulfilling the words of this parable because, due to the fact that the "Kingdom's banquet room" was still not full, someone had to take the message of the "Kingdom of God" out into the "highways" and "hedges?" To be consistent with the words of the Lord's parable, someone had to compel the scattered Jews to come to the banquet room! It is remarkably consistent!

And here is a major question to ponder: After the Jews, the Jews all over the world, rejected Paul's message about the Kingdom, was the "attendance list" for the Lord's banquet full...or do you think "...there...is....yet...room?"

Without a doubt, according to the record of the book of Acts and the continual rejections by the Jews, there is still room at the Lord's banquet table in the Kingdom! How could we make any other conclusion?

And, remember, the Lord's goal in the parable was that His "house may be filled." Who, then, will fill up those empty seats of the Kingdom banquet hall? If the Lord's goal was to fill those seats, does that mean He was not be able to accomplish His goal because the Jews all over the world said, "No?" That is unthinkable! If the Lord wants His banquet room to be full, we can confidently say that it will be full!

And with whom will He fill those empty seats, if the nation of Israel all over the world will not come to the banquet? Does it now start to become clear why Paul taught those Gentiles - who came to his hired house for a period of two years - about the "Kingdom of God?"

If Paul was the "servant," sent out to the highways and hedges outside of the city of Israel, tasked with the job of filling up the Lord's Kingdom banquet hall, does it not stand to reason that he would finish his assigned task? And finish that task with whomever he could find?

Yes, Paul clearly said that it was necessary that the Word of God should *first* have been spoken to [the Jews]" (Acts 13:46), but what if the Jews did not accept that Word? What was the remedy? Paul was just as clear about that:

ACTS 13

⁴⁶...but seeing ye [Jews] put [the Word of God] from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles. ⁴⁷For so hath the Lord commanded us, *saying*, I have set thee to be a light of the Gentiles, that thou shouldest be for salvation unto the ends of the earth.

Paul's remedy to the Jews rejecting the invitation to the Kingdom banquet was to turn to the Gentiles. Thus, when Paul had Gentiles coming to his hired house for a period of two years, he taught them the "Kingdom of God."

Is that not completely consistent with the parable the Lord Jesus told about the "Kingdom of God" in Luke 14? In the parable, the servant was tasked with gathering guests until the banquet room would be "filled." There is no back-up plan outlined for the servant in the parable, no "plan B" articulated. The Lord, in the parable, tasked the servant with gathering guests until the banquet room was full.

This raises another critical question about the Lord in the parable: Does the Lord in this parable about the "Kingdom of God" create a different supper event for those outside the city, a supper to be held in a completely different place? Or does the Lord invite those outside "the city" to the very same supper that He has already prepared?

This question is very pertinent to this paper's discussion regarding those who hold the "Acts 28" position and their assertion that, upon the rejection by the Jewish leaders, one hope ended and another hope began. Would that teaching not be analogous – in the parable – to the Lord leaving His initial banquet unfilled and inviting others to an entirely different banquet? Yes, it would!

However, in the Lord's parable, it is not a new "supper event" being offered to those outside the city, it is an invitation to the very same "supper event" held in the very same city in which it was originally going to be held! The Lord will have His banquet, His feast, in Jerusalem in the prophesied "Kingdom of God." Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob will be present at that feast in the

“Kingdom of God.” And every seat will be full, regardless of whether it is a Jewish person who fills those seats or not! In fact, the Lord in the parable says:

LUKE 14

²⁴...that **NONE** of those men which were bidden shall taste of my supper.

Again, who were those “men that were bidden” to the supper? The Jews!

So, if none of those “bidden” will “taste of [the Lord’s] supper,” who are the people who have to fill up the empty seats so that the banquet room will be full? Would it not be the Gentiles? Was it not prophesied that “the Lord of hosts [shall] make unto *all people* a feast of fat things?” (Isa. 25:6) Did the Lord Jesus not also say that many will “shall come from the east, and *from* the west, and from the north, and *from* the south, and shall sit down in the kingdom of God”? (Luke 13:29) And did the Lord Jesus not finish that statement by saying, “...behold, there are last which shall be first, and there are first which shall be last”?

We have seen that the Apostle Paul very clearly established who was “first,” have we not? The “Jews” were to receive the invitations “first!” Who, then, received the invitations to the Kingdom “last?” Was it not the Gentiles? Would the Jews rejection of the invitations, then, not put the “first last”...and the Gentiles receiving of that Kingdom message make the “last first?” And isn’t that what we see playing out when Paul is rejected by the Jews...and turns to the Gentiles?

Thus, the Lord’s teachings about the “Kingdom of God” are marvelously consistent when we find the Apostle Paul, after the final rejection by the Jews in the city of Rome, speaking to the Gentiles about the “Kingdom of God.” At that time, there were many seats in the “Kingdom banquet hall” which still needed to be filled, and the Gentiles, in contrast to the Jews, “were listening” to the glorious truths about the “Kingdom of God.” That is what the exact text of Acts 28 clearly teaches.

Now, there are those who teach that when Paul taught about the “Kingdom of God” to the Gentiles, that he was referring to what they would call the “universal” or “overall” Kingdom of God. Prominent authors of the “Acts 28 position” teach this and many who hold to what is called the “mid-Acts dispensational” position will teach this same thing. They will say that when Paul is teaching about the “Kingdom of God,” he is teaching about God’s “overall reign” over the entire universe and is not teaching about the specific “Kingdom of God” that is coming on the earth, the Kingdom in which the Lord Jesus will literally sit in Jerusalem and have the nation of Israel minister unto Him. That theological position warrants a study all it’s own, a study to which I refer the reader at the end of this paper. But, again, to confine ourselves to the specific topic of this paper, does the text here in Acts 28 bear this out? Does Luke indicate Paul is teaching a “universal” Kingdom?

In verse 23, Luke describes that Paul was teaching “the Kingdom of God” and he was utilizing passages from the “law of Moses” and from “the prophets” to bring forth confirmation about Jesus being the prophesied King of that coming Kingdom. Can this be anything other than the “Kingdom of God” coming on the earth, a Kingdom about which Moses and the prophets taught? Can it be any other “Kingdom” than that Kingdom which Moses and the prophets were to inherit? No! Paul, who was very well versed in the Scriptures from a very early age, knew all about this “Kingdom” taught in “Moses” and in “the prophets!” So, Luke, in writing this section of Acts, makes the topic being presented by Paul very clear in verse 23. He does this by stating

that Paul was teaching about the “Kingdom of God” from the “law of Moses” and from “the prophets.” By the exact, spirit-chosen words used in this verse, there is absolutely no doubt about the meaning of the phrase “Kingdom of God” which Luke uses here in verse 23.

Eight short verses later, Luke again describes what Paul is teaching and this time he is telling us what Paul was teaching to the Gentiles...and the phrase Luke uses is, once again, “the Kingdom of God.”

Same exact English words. Same exact Greek words. Same exact phrase.

Luke simply says Paul was teaching “the Kingdom of God” to the Gentiles. He does not add any qualifiers to this statement to change the meaning of the phrase he just used eight verses earlier. In other words, Luke does nothing to indicate that the phrase “Kingdom of God” in verse 31 means anything different than the phrase “Kingdom of God” in verse 23. The natural assumption of any writer would be that if he had already clarified a phrase he has used in his writing, then he would not need to re-clarify it again – especially if he uses the exact same phrase again in the very immediate context of his original clarification! To say the phrase “Kingdom of God” in verse 31 means something completely different than the phrase “Kingdom of God” in verse 23 is an unbelievable stretch! It lacks any textural support or basic rationale!

If there are two aspects or two variations to the “Kingdom of God” which Paul taught (and as some assert today), then Luke, by the Holy Spirit’s inspiration, does us a great disservice by not clarifying that Paul changed his subject matter from the “earthly” Kingdom (they would say, in verse 23) to an “overall” Kingdom (they would say, in verse 31)! Does it make any sense, that Luke (with the Holy Spirit’s inspired words) would be almost intentionally deceptive?

If it was actually the case that Paul started teaching a different “Kingdom of God” after Acts 28:28 or even a different aspect of the “Kingdom of God” after Acts 28:28, would it not have been critical for Luke to clarify this for us? Could Luke not have very easily stated something like “Paul taught them the aspects of the overall Kingdom of God which applied to them?” Or that “Paul taught them the “Kingdom of God and the fact that the Gentiles would no longer have access to it?” But that is not what is there! We cannot add to the text to fit our belief system!

ACTS 28

³⁰And Paul dwelt two whole years in his own hired house, and received all that came in unto him, ³¹Preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ, with all confidence, no man forbidding him.

Those who hold that Acts 28:28 marks the end of one message (what they call “the Gospel of the Kingdom”) and the beginning of another message (what they call “the Gospel of the Grace of God”) fail to see how the very plain language used by Luke here completely contradicts that theory. One of the leaders of the “Acts 28” dispensational movement, in his commentary on the book of Acts, seems to maintain that the “Kingdom of God” in verse 31 somehow is different than the “Kingdom of God” in verse 23. He then goes so far as to say that Paul, being in that hired house for two years, was “free to receive all that came to him and fulfilled his obligation to enlighten all as to what is the dispensation of the mystery” (meaning, in this author’s mind, that after Acts 28:28, Paul immediately started to teach a new, “heavenly hope” for mankind, that at that moment a new church was started with a heavenly destination which is distinct from the church that will be in the “Kingdom of God” upon the earth, etc., etc.).*⁴

But where is the evidence for that concept here in Luke's text? Does Luke say that Paul taught those Gentiles the "dispensation of the mystery?" Does Luke say that Paul began to teach the Gentiles about a new, heavenly hope or a new destination for believers? Or does it say Paul taught them the "Kingdom of God?"

Luke very plainly says that Paul taught the Gentiles in Acts 28:31 (after the supposed "dispensational landmark") exactly what he was teaching the Jews in Acts 28:23 (before the "dispensational landmark")! Where is the change of the message here in the book of Acts? Where is the "new gospel" here? Where is the "new hope" here? The text in Acts 28:31 does not support the idea that a change occurred in God's message or the hope that Paul was to proclaim!

As far as Luke's narrative is concerned, there is no new message! After the Jewish rejection of the "Kingdom of God" message, Paul continues teaching the very same "Kingdom of God" message when he goes to the Gentiles! The plain words of Acts 28 cannot be made to say anything else!

And is this not consistent with the Apostle Paul's God-given message to the Gentiles anyway? While the subject of this paper is not the overall message and purpose of the Apostle Paul, we can at least establish a few pertinent points: Was not Paul sent to proclaim to the Gentiles the "Mystery of Christ," which was the fact that the Gentiles would be "fellow heirs" with the redeemed Jews, that they would be of the "same body" as the redeemed Jews, and that they would be partakers of God's promise in Christ by the gospel? (Eph. 3:6).

We know from the Scriptures what the Jews are going to inherit. Based on "the promise" (which every good Jew knows to be the promise to Abraham), the Jews will receive an inheritance – an allotment – in the Kingdom of God. They will receive a portion of the land originally promised to Abraham and to his seed. Moses and the prophets spell this out. If, then, Paul taught that the Gentiles are "joint heirs" with Israel, doesn't that mean they inherit a portion – an allotment – of the very same thing the Jews are going to inherit? If the Gentiles are "partakers" of what Paul calls "His promise," don't the Gentiles get a part of the inheritance associated with that promise (see Gal. 3:29)? The "Mystery of Christ," which was the heart of the Apostle Paul's message, was all about the Gentiles inheriting the same thing the Jews would inherit, was it not?

Was not Paul, at the very outset of his ministry, charged to let the Gentiles know that they would have "an inheritance among [the saved Jews] which were sanctified by the faith that [was] in [Christ]?" (Acts 26:18) And did not Paul continue, throughout his ministry, to teach the Gentiles that they would be "partakers of the *inheritance of the saints* in light?" And that they, along with the redeemed Jews, had been "translated into the *Kingdom of His dear Son*?" (Col. 1:12-13)

This, then, is not a new hope that Paul is establishing in his ministry, but a new revelation that there are new recipients of an existing, but glorious hope! It is the mystery, the secret truth of God that the Gentiles are "fellow heirs" of a glorious inheritance previously only open to the Jews and their converts. It was a message that includes Gentiles in the same Body as the Jews. And it was a message that the Gentiles partake of that "promise" – "His promise" – in Christ, a promise of inheritance made to Abraham long, long ago. This perfectly fits the text in Acts 28.

Summing up our topic, then, we began with the basic question: Does Acts 28:28 signal a change in God's dealings with mankind? My answer, as I have tried to bring forth, is both yes and no.

Yes, God changed His dealings with mankind after Acts 28:28 because He turned from a Christ-rejecting Israel, temporarily ending all hope of the realization of that Kingdom of God until a still future point in time. The signs of that Kingdom, consequently, faded with the hope of the immediate realization of that Kingdom.

But the answer to the question set forth in this paper can also be “No.” We can confidently say that God – through His servant Paul - is still setting forth that very same “Kingdom of God” as a hope...now a future hope for the Gentiles of an inheritance in that “Kingdom of God” in spite of the fact that the Gentiles are not receiving that message of hope through a redeemed, Jewish “Kingdom of Priests.” The precise text here in Acts 28 cannot be taken any other way.

For those who would like further study on the Apostle Paul’s teaching about the “Kingdom of God”, I would refer them to the additional study I have written entitled “Paul and the Kingdom of God.” This study is an examination of every time Paul uses the word “Kingdom” along with instances in the scripture where it is related that Paul is teaching about the “Kingdom.”

For those who would like further study on the message that the Apostle Paul set forth to the Gentiles, I would refer them to the additional study I have written entitled “The Apostle Paul and the Definition of the Mystery.” This paper sets forth more completely what the “Mystery of Christ” is that the Apostle to the Gentiles was sent to proclaim.

For those who would like further study on the Acts 28 position, I would refer them to several studies that will be published in the future on the Book of Ephesians. Many of the perspectives and concepts outlined in this document are the result of a very in-depth study I did in recent years on the book of Ephesians. I undertook this study with a view to examine and consider the “Acts 28” position and came away with a completely new understanding of what I believe the Bible teaches about the Apostle Paul, his ministry, and his message.

These papers – and many other resources – will be posted on our website as soon as they are available: www.ourhopetoday.org

Endnotes

^{*1} It is critical to note here that Faith, listed as a gift of the Spirit here in 1 Corinthians, was only given to *some* of the *believers*, not all of the believers. This is clear because the text reads “For to one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom...to another faith by the same Spirit.” In this example, some believers received one gift (the “word of wisdom”) while other believers received a different gift (i.e., “faith”). Following the concepts as they are presented here, not every believer received the “word of wisdom”...and not every believer received the gift of “faith.” This clearly shows that the gift of “faith” referred to in this particular passage was not the faith that enacts our salvation and places us into the Body of Christ (for all believers have at least that measure of faith). The gift of faith spoken of here has to be the supernatural granting of additional faith by the spirit of God to one that is already a believer. An example of this would be Lydia in Acts 16:14.

^{*2} Many believers point to Ephesians 2:8 as an example of “Faith” being described as a gift, but the “gift of God” being spoken of in Ephesians 2:8 has to be our salvation. Without going into

extensive detail, the specific Greek words used in Ephesians 2:8 bear this out. For further study on this topic, please see my studies on Ephesians 2, which will be posted on ourhopetoday.org.

Suffice it to say this: The process by which saving faith is enacted is already clearly outlined by Paul in Chapter 1 of the book of Ephesians. Paul says, in Ephesians 1:13, "...In whom [Christ] ye also *trusted*, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest of our inheritance..." There is an extremely clear progression enunciated here. It can be communicated in two different ways. The first way it can be expressed is like this:

1. The Ephesians heard the word of truth, the gospel of [their] salvation
2. The Ephesians *trusted* in Christ (i.e., after they heard the word of truth...)

It can also be said this way:

1. The Ephesians heard the word of truth, the gospel of [their] salvation
2. The Ephesians *believed* in Christ
3. The Ephesians were sealed with that Spirit of promise, the deposit on their inheritance

Do not miss the plain text: The *Ephesians* trusted ("ye...trusted") and the *Ephesians* believed ("ye believed"). It does not say "ye were made to believe" or "ye were led to believe." The very basic subject-verb construction of this Scripture ascribes the Ephesians full credit for their trust. The Scripture ascribes the Ephesians full credit for their belief. *This* is ever the formula for saving faith. Those who get trapped debating about Ephesians 2 forget about Ephesians 1! A proper interpretation of Ephesians 2 must agree with Ephesians 1! It is the same in Romans: "Abraham believed God." If Abraham did not believe God – and God made Abraham believe – then the Scripture is not accurately stated. But it plainly states, "Abraham believed God." "Faith," says the Scripture, "comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God" (Rom. 11:17).

^{*3} See the commentary on Acts, *From Pentecost to Prison*, by Charles Welch, Page 387, where the author states that a new dispensation is ushered in by the words of Acts 28:28, and Page 390, where the author states that Acts 28:28 is the dispensational landmark.

^{*4} See the commentary on Acts, *From Pentecost to Prison*, by Charles Welch, Page 391, where this quote appears.