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THE KINGDOM SUSPENDED - PUNISHMENT OR PLAN?

by Candy Davis

WAS SUSPENDING ISRAEL'S KINGDOM GOD'S PUNISHMENT?

When a student gets suspended from school, it is an act of punitive discipline. When Israel's Kingdom got suspended at the end of the Acts Period, it was for the same purpose—to punish Israel . . . or so say many in Christendom. This notion is incorrect and can be traced to the misunderstanding of certain Scriptures.

Matthew 21:33-45: THE KINGDOM WAS SUSPENDED BECAUSE ISRAEL REJECTED HER SAVIOR

As commonly taught, the parable of the wicked vinedressers (Matt. 21:33-45) portrays the Jews, with their Kingdom program, as being set aside in punishment for rejecting their Savior, and subsequently the Gentiles are portrayed taking over with their “church” program.

Not so! Far from rejecting Him, the common Jews are recorded as having followed Christ in “great multitudes” (Matt. 4:23-24; Matt. 8:1,18; Matt. 12:15; Matt. 13:2; Matt. 14:14; Matt. 15:29-31; Matt. 19:2; Matt. 20:29). The ones being condemned in this parable are the religious leaders of Israel who envied the Lord Jesus for his popularity (Matt. 27:18). These fear losing their power and sovereignty on account of Him (John 11:48). Their worst fear comes true in the Acts Period when their governmental authority is revoked by God, who duly replaces them with His new Kingdom leaders (Acts 5:32). We thus have the proper interpretation of this parable.

As for accusing the Jews of rejecting their Savior, we offer this simple truth in their defense: The Jews, for the most part, did not know that Jesus was their promised Messiah, the Son of God. Their ignorance was the Lord's will (Luke 23:34). He did not want the people to know (Matt. 16:20) until after His resurrection. Nowhere in the early ministry of the Lord Jesus do we read a single statement to the Jews declaring Him to be the promised Messiah,

only that the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand, so repent (Matt. 4:17). Jump ahead three years to His triumphal entry, and we see the people of Jerusalem still in ignorance. They have to ask, **Who is this?** (Matt. 21:10). The Jews identify Him as nothing more than a prophet (Matt. 14:5; Matt. 21:11). The Jews are innocent of rejecting their Savior.

ACTS 3:19-21: THE KINGDOM WAS SUSPENDED BECAUSE ISRAEL DID NOT REPENT (SUBMIT)

In the Acts Period, Peter proclaimed, **Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing [the Kingdom of God] may come from the presence of the Lord, and that He may send Jesus Christ, who was preached to you before** (Acts 3:19-20). Here is a passage that gets chopped to pieces, ending up a shadow of its former self: “Repent therefore . . . and He will send Jesus Christ.” This makes the condition for the return of Christ to be the repentance of Israel. If Israel repented, Christ would return right then and there. His immediate return, however, would cause a problem. It would turn God’s timeline of prophesied events topsy-turvy. It would have the Lord cutting ahead in line, displacing 1) the coming of Elijah to restore all things (Matt. 17:11), 2) the coming of the man of sin (2 Thess. 2:3), and 3) the great tribulation (Matt. 24).

By chopping up our passage, an element essential for understanding is missing: The coming of the times of refreshing, which is another term for the Kingdom of God. The true order of events is as follows: 1) Israel repents (submits) and turns to God (with the view of their sins being blotted out), 2) The times of refreshing [the Kingdom/government of God] comes from the face of the Lord, 3) The Lord sends Jesus Christ

As we can see, only when #1 and #2 are fulfilled will Jesus Christ return to earth. Only when the times of refreshing (the times of the Kingdom/government of God on earth, lasting 500+ years) are an accomplished fact will Jesus leave His place in heaven and return to earth. That the condition for the return of Christ is in no way related to the repentance of Israel is confirmed in the next verse: **whom heaven must receive until the times of restoration of all things [another term for the Kingdom of God], which God has spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began** (Acts 3:21).

Nowhere is it suggested that heaven must receive Him (Mark 16:19) until Israel repents. Heaven, rather, must receive Him until the times of restoration of all things; until the restorative work performed in the Kingdom is done.

The view that Israel’s Kingdom is suspended for her failure to repent (submit) is a mistaken one. Israel in fact *did* repent; she did submit and turn to

God. We witness this when we come to the end of the Acts Period, where we find the majority of Israelites to be believers in the Lord Jesus as their Savior and Messiah (Acts 21:20).

Yet many still put forth the idea that Israel failed to repent, and as a consequence was punished with the suspension of her Kingdom. A popular dispensationalist writes, "God foreknew that Israel would not repent and that Jesus would not return at that time, and He also foreknew that He had planned before the ages began, to inject an entirely new dispensation of His grace through the Apostle Paul as a consequence of Israel's rejection." Notice, as a *consequence*.

Acts 28:22-28: THE ISAIAH 6 WARNING - ISRAEL IS TO BE PUNISHED LIKE HER ANCESTORS

Those who maintain that Israel's kingdom is suspended as punishment like to prove the point by citing this Acts 28 passage, which quotes a warning from Isaiah (Isa. 6:9-10). At the time Isaiah spoke this to Israel, he was warning them to stop their idolatry and return to the Lord or they would be exiled from their land and its blessings. When this warning is repeated in Acts 28, these assume that God once again is about to lower the boom on unbelieving Israel. But they are mistaken.

The scene in Acts 28 finds Paul spending a full day in Rome with the Jewish leaders there. Paul **explains and testifies to them of the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus from both the Law of Moses and the Prophets** (Acts 28:23). In the end, roughly half of the leaders choose to believe Paul's message about Christ; the rest do not. In response, Paul quotes the Isaiah 6 warning . . . but only as a statement of rebuke to the rejecting Jewish leaders, not as a warning of impending punishment. Paul is using the quote to say, "Hey, we've seen the likes of you before. You're just like your ancestors. They didn't want to hear or see the truth, either."

With Paul's next words we are introduced to a great change in God's program. **Therefore let it be known to you that the salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles, and they will hear it!** (Acts 28:28). Paul declares that the nations will now receive the gospel that these leaders rejected. No punishment is in view here, just a statement introducing God's new plan. Which brings us to our next section.

SUSPENDING ISRAEL'S KINGDOM WAS GOD'S PLAN

God had a purpose for the Acts Period: He wanted His gospel to be preached to every Israelite in the world (Mark 16:15-18): **that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, begin-**

ning at Jerusalem (Luke 24:47). But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth (Acts 1:8).

Scripture confirms that God’s purpose is successfully completed by the end of Acts (Mark 16:20; Rom. 10:18-19; Col. 1:5-6, 23). All Israelites have heard the gospel. Mission accomplished. So right here (Acts 28:28) is where the kingdom is suspended in order to bring in a new program which, although unprophesied, was God’s plan all along (Eph. 2:7). Now God will be dealing with all nations on an equal basis. His administration will be one of pure grace in order to display the grace inherent in His character

For any still clinging to the notion that Israel’s kingdom was suspended as punishment, a careful reading of the following passage should settle the matter. Jesus speaking to his twelve disciples said, **Therefore, when they had come together, they asked Him, saying, “Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?”** [when will you bring in the Kingdom in full?] **And He said to them, “It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority (Acts 1:6-7).**

The Lord is clear. It is not for the disciples to know when the Kingdom in full will arrive, and here is why: God never gave Israel the responsibility or the authority for this in the first place. What Israel does or does not do makes no difference. The coming of the full Kingdom is up to God, not them. The Kingdom is not an offer. The offer, rather, is for the Jews to become a part of the Kingdom, but it is coming regardless.

When a student is punished with a disciplinary suspension, it goes on his school record and stays there. In contrast, Israel has a disciplinary suspension on her permanent record, but this blot is one she does not deserve. Israel did nothing wrong to cause the suspension of her Kingdom, as we have seen. The suspension was not an act of punishment, but something God planned from the start so that He could display the grace inherent in His character in a new dispensation of pure grace.

It is time we clear Israel’s record of any wrongdoing regarding the suspension of her Kingdom.

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