

## **Section Two: The Kingdom of God on Earth (Present)**

### **Category A: Church – Kingdom Intelligence Report #5**

Topic: The Harmony of the Mystery

In light of the current and deeply divisive controversy over the extent of the Church Age, it is hard to imagine a time when this issue was marked by harmony rather than controversy. Yet such a time did exist in the early church. There was no doubt in the minds of the first Christians that the Church had replaced Israel as God's new instrument for fulfilling His purposes in the world; serving as an expression of His Kingdom on earth. But there was even less doubt in the minds of those early believers that this replacement would be **temporary** in its duration; with all the promises of God for the nation of Israel, in experiencing a kingdom on earth, remaining in effect. It was so much in the forefront of the minds of the apostles that they thought it would happen sooner rather than later. So they inquire in Acts 1:6 – **“So when they had come together, they were asking Him, saying, ‘Lord, is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?’”** The apostles knew it would be the Lord, and not them, who would accomplish this.

Such a question was understandable prior to Pentecost; as a follow-up to the teaching of Jesus regarding the Kingdom of God in Acts 1:3b. The common sense implication of that question confirms what Christ taught the disciples: Israel's restoration to its promised place in God's Kingdom would occur. The only remaining question was not “if?” but “when?” If they had somehow drastically misunderstood the Savior's teaching, then why not clarify their confusion immediately? If the replacement of Israel by the Church was something permanent, why didn't the Lord say, “Israel rejected Me and I have rejected them, once and for all and forever. I am permanently done with Israel because of what they did to Me.” But He doesn't say that because it would not have been true; and our Lord is no liar; nor was He ever mistaken or misguided, as some of His followers are today. Instead, the explanation which Christ does give His apostles is two-fold. First, the timeframe for Israel's re-establishment was none of their concern (Acts 1:7). Second, their responsibility would have as its focus, the fulfillment of the Great Commission, which Jesus reiterates in a very powerful and fresh manner in Acts 1:8 –

**“. . . but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth.”**

It certainly seems that this answer did indeed clarify their confusion. Both Peter and James, when the need arose, spoke of a temporary interval of significant Gentile inclusion into the Kingdom of God, **before** the restoration of that Kingdom to the nation of Israel. Peter describes this reinstatement as something in the future; with an emphasis on the need for repentance in the present moment, during his second sermon in the portico of Solomon (Acts 3:17-26). In resolving the issue of Gentile conversion and circumcision, James shows strong insight into the temporary nature of this interval by affirming it as **“how God first concerned Himself about taking from among the Gentiles a people for His name.”** (Acts 15:14) He then quotes from Amos 9:11 in order to dispel any misunderstanding and alleviate any concern about what this interval would mean for the future of Israel. The Lord would return for the express purpose of restoring the nation to its promised place in God's Kingdom on earth (Acts 15:15-18; cf. Romans 11:25-27).