

## Chapter VII

### THE TRANSITION

It is important for us to understand that the Jews were the custodians of the truth of God's redemptive plan for approximately fifteen hundred years prior to the first advent of our Lord Jesus Christ. The Old Testament Scriptures (of which Israel was the custodian) began to be written about the time that Israel became a nation and departed from the land of Egypt. They were completed about eleven hundred years later, forty-nine years after she returned to Israel following seventy years of captivity in Babylon. Thus the Old Testament was completed four hundred and thirty-four years before the crucifixion of Christ.

Israel was delivered from Egypt by the blood of the Passover lamb, which was the last of ten judgments upon the false gods of Egypt. When Israel departed Egypt she possessed an oral tradition relating to God that had been passed from father to son all the way back to Adam; and as the Spirit of God *moved holy men of old* to write, she became the possessor of the Old Testament Scriptures. The New Testament tells us *all scripture is given by inspiration of God*;

## The Transition

and it tells us all of the writers of Scripture (both Old and New Testaments) were Jews, which was one of the benefits of being a Jew, according to the testimony of the apostle Paul in the third chapter of the book of Romans.

After the first Passover and the deaths of all of the firstborn in Egypt, God led Israel out of Egypt by a pillar of fire by night and a pillar of cloud by day. They crossed the Red Sea by the mighty hand of God and journeyed to Sinai, where God offered them the covenant of the law: *And all the people answered together, and said, All that the LORD hath spoken, we will do* (Exodus 19:8). They did this without considering the weaknesses of the flesh, nor all of the grumbling they had done during the judgments in Egypt, nor the grumbling against Moses and the Lord on the way to Sinai. Apparently they believed they really could keep all that the Lord had spoken. In his letter to the Romans, Paul has given us a view of the Jewish mind:

Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved. For I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge. For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God. (Romans 10:1-3, emphasis mine)

Despite their oath, or perhaps because of it, Israel wandered in the wilderness for forty years. There were a few high points along the way, but mostly these years were caused by and characterized by unbelief. After the death of Moses, Israel crossed Jordan into Canaan, where her entrance into the land was characterized by the same kind of unbelief. She failed to utterly destroy the inhabitants of the land according to God's command and settled down with them. Thus, through the evil counsel of Balaam, the Jews, who could not be cursed because they were blessed, allowed their children to be cursed by their cohabitation and intermarriage with the people of the

## The Transition

land and the acceptance of their false gods.

The history of Israel was never smooth. From the outset, there were periods of faithfulness, followed by unbelief; followed by outright apostasy; followed by God's judgment; followed by a period of revival; and the cycle would start all over again. Despite her cyclic behavior, God ruled the nation of Israel through the judges for four hundred and fifty years following their entrance into the land.

Nevertheless, in the days of Samuel, the Jews rejected the rule of God for the rule of a king. God told Samuel to protest solemnly, but to give them a king; and so God chose Saul to be the first king of Israel. Saul started out well as king, but then his pride lifted him up to act contrary to the truth of the Word of God; so God raised up *David, a man after God's own heart*, to be king in Israel after the death of Saul. God promised David a kingdom that will never end. This will be fulfilled in our Lord Jesus Christ, Who is of the seed of David after the flesh, when He returns to this earth to establish the Kingdom of God.

David reigned faithfully for forty years. When he died, Solomon, the son of David and Bathsheba, was chosen of God to reign as king. He ruled faithfully for a period of time until *outlandish women cause him to sin*. Solomon erected shrines to the many false gods of his seven hundred wives and three hundred concubines. God swore to judge him for this, but postponed the judgment until after the death of Solomon for David's sake (I Kings 11:11-12). This judgment resulted in a division of Israel between Jeroboam in the north and Rehoboam in the south. The northern kingdom was called Israel, and the southern kingdom was called Judah. From the outset apostasy reigned in Israel, while Judah was somewhat faithful to the Lord. This resulted in the

## The Transition

Assyrian captivity of Israel, and later, when Judah also apostatized, the destruction of the temple and the Babylonian captivity of Judah and Benjamin.

This captivity lasted for seventy years according to the prophecy of Jeremiah (29:10); and in the first year of Cyrus, king of Persia, Cyrus gave a decree for the Jews to return to the land of Israel (II Chronicles 36:22-23) and rebuild the city of Jerusalem and its walls. Forty-two thousand three hundred and sixty Jews, along with seven thousand three hundred and thirty-seven of their servants, responded to this decree (Ezra 2:64-65). When they set about the work of rebuilding the walls and the temple according to the decree, they were met with opposition (Ezra 4:1-5) from the Samaritans. These were Jews who were not carried away into captivity and had intermarried with the other inhabitants of the land. Eventually the city of Jerusalem and the temple were rebuilt according to the decree of Cyrus and the later decree of Darius Hystaspes (Esther's husband), also a king of Persia (Ezra 4:4-5).

This temple was nothing compared to the temple that had been built by Solomon. When the Jews who had seen the former temple beheld Zerubbabel's temple, they wept (Ezra 3:12). During these years the Jews were ruled by Gentile powers. First they were ruled by the Babylonians, then the Persians, who were followed by the Greeks; and, finally, before the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ, they were under the dominion of Rome.

About sixteen years prior to the birth of our Lord Jesus, Herod the Great made a pact with the Jews to rebuild, enlarge and increase the stature of Zerubbabel's temple. Herod's temple had been being renovated for forty-six years (John 2:20) at the time of the wedding in Cana of Galilee, which our Lord attended and where he changed the water into wine. It is interesting to note that

## The Transition

this renovation continued until the temple was finally completed about two years before it was destroyed by the Romans in 70 A.D.

The Jews to whom James addressed his epistle were the Jews who remained in the Gentile nations where they had been scattered by years of Gentile dominion. The majority of the Jews alive today have come from families which for centuries have lived outside of the promised land. Only a remnant have remained in the land through all of its trials, or have returned to the land to be citizens of the modern state of Israel since its rebirth on May 14, 1948.

It was this scattering of Jews throughout the world which brought about the synagogue form of worship. It was this system of worship, along with the erosion of the truth in Jerusalem, which was responsible for the almost complete failure of the sacrificial system to point the Jews to faith in Christ. The *schoolmaster* role of the law required a failure before the law to be atoned for with an appropriate sacrifice. This was how the law pointed the Jews to faith in Christ. However this could not be done in a synagogue. Synagogues were meeting houses, or prayer houses, and had no Scriptural authority to offer sacrifices for sin. Each synagogue had its leader, who was generally steeped in the traditions of the elders and conveyed this tradition by adherence to the teachings of the Rabbis. Thus there was little about the Jews of the diaspora's manner of worship that could lead them to faith in Christ.

For the most part, the only connection the Jews of the twelve tribes scattered abroad had with the sacrificial system was during the three feasts in the year, which required the attendance in Jerusalem of all of the devout Jewish men of the world (Deuteronomy 16:16). These feasts were the feast of Unleavened Bread (which included Passover and Firstfruits), the feast of

## The Transition

Pentecost, and the feast of Tabernacles (which was in close proximity to the feast of Trumpets and the Day of Atonement). The requirement for all the devout Jews to be in Jerusalem for these feasts provided (and will provide) that certain ones of them would (or will) observe the most important events in the history of Israel.

For example, during our Lord's first advent, at the feast of Unleavened Bread the Jews had the opportunity to observe the crucifixion of Christ (on the preparation of the Passover), His burial (just before the Passover Sabbath began) and His resurrection from the dead (on the feast of Firstfruits, witnessed only by Jewish believers). Then on the feast of Pentecost, fifty days after His resurrection, they had the opportunity to observe the giving of the Holy Spirit to the New Testament church, when the church spake with tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance. Therefore it is very likely, based upon the way the first four feasts of the Jews were fulfilled, that at the second advent of the Lord, the majority of the world's Jewry will be in Jerusalem at the time of the resurrection of the redeemed, as typified by the feast of Trumpets; the return of our Lord Jesus Christ to this earth, as typified by the high priest coming out of the Holy of Holies on the Day of Atonement to bring salvation to Israel; and the millennial reign of Christ, as typified by the observance of the feast of Tabernacles every year during the millennium.

The church at Jerusalem was so steeped in the traditions of Jewry, it was difficult for them to make the transition from a covenant of law (albeit a *schoolmaster*) to justification by faith apart from the deeds of the law. Old habits and a lifetime of traditions die hard. Thus James remained zealous for the law long into his ministry, and his zeal for the law was very much in evidence when Paul returned to Jerusalem after his third missionary journey into Asia. This was more than

## The Transition

thirty years after the crucifixion, burial and resurrection of the Lord. It was this zeal for the law that motivated James to ask Paul to purify himself with four brethren who had made Jewish vows.

The narrative describes these four brethren at the time when they were about to end their vows. According to the sixth chapter of the book of Numbers, a vow was ended by observing eight days of purification rites. The head of the individual who made the vow was shaved on the seventh day of purification. On the eighth day the priest offered a burnt-offering, a sin-offering, and a meal-offering for the one ending the vow. This was the rite of cleansing when a vow was broken, or when the days of the vow were fulfilled.

Thus, in the book of Acts, Luke gives a clear description of the events that led Paul to involve himself (at the request of James) with four brethren in Jewish rites of purification:

And when we were come to Jerusalem, the brethren received us gladly. And the day following Paul went in with us unto James; and all the elders were present. And when he had saluted them, he declared particularly what things God had wrought among the Gentiles by his ministry.

And when they heard it, they glorified the Lord, and said unto him, Thou seest, brother, how many thousands of Jews there are which believe; and they are all zealous of the law: and they are informed of thee, that thou teachest all the Jews which are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, saying that they ought not to circumcise their children, neither to walk after the customs. What is it therefore? The multitude must needs come together: for they will hear that thou art come.

Do therefore this that we say to thee: We have four men which have a vow on them; them take, and purify thyself with them, and be at charges with them, that they may shave their heads: and all may know that those things, whereof they were informed concerning thee, are nothing; but that thou thyself also walkest orderly, and keepest the law.

As touching the Gentiles which believe, we have written and concluded that they observe no such thing, save only that they keep themselves from things offered to idols, and from blood, and from strangled, and from fornication. Then Paul took the men, and the next day purifying himself with them entered into the temple, to signify the accomplishment of the days of purification, until that an offering should be offered for every one of them.

And when the seven days were almost ended, the Jews which were of Asia, when

## The Transition

they saw him in the temple, stirred up all the people, and laid hands on him, crying out, Men of Israel, help: This is the man, that teacheth all men every where against the people, and the law, and this place: and further brought Greeks also into the temple, and hath polluted this holy place. (For they had seen before with him in the city Trophimus an Ephesian, whom they supposed that Paul had brought into the temple.) And all the city was moved, and the people ran together: and they took Paul, and drew him out of the temple: and forthwith the doors were shut. And as they went about to kill him, tidings came unto the chief captain of the band, that all Jerusalem was in an uproar. Who immediately took soldiers and centurions, and ran down unto them: and when they saw the chief captain and the soldiers, they left beating of Paul. (Acts 21:17-32, emphasis mine)

This account is all we have to determine why Paul was willing to enter the rites of purification with these brethren, which is clearly contrary to what he had previously written to the Galatians. We can only guess: Perhaps it was seeing all of the Jews in the church in Jerusalem. Perhaps it was nostalgia over being back in Jerusalem, where Paul had been trained at the feet of Gamaliel. Perhaps it was the persuasiveness of James for unity among the brethren. Whatever it was, Paul succumbed to the request despite what appears to be a clear breach of Paul's understanding.

Nevertheless the Lord worked together for good the circumstances that ensued, for the circumstances precipitated Paul's two-year imprisonment at Caesarea. This appears to be the time when the Holy Spirit moved Paul to write the book of Romans. This can be seen in the Greek text of Romans 1:13, because in that text Paul states: *But I do not wish you to be ignorant, brethren, that many times I proposed to come to you, and was hindered until the present ...* (emphasis mine). It was at Caesarea that Paul said: *I stand at Caesar's judgment seat, where I ought to be judged: to the Jews have I done no wrong, as thou very well knowest. For if I be an offender, or have committed any thing worthy of death, I refuse not to die: but if there be none of these things whereof these accuse me, no man may deliver me unto them. I appeal unto Caesar. Then Festus,*

## The Transition

*when he had conferred with the council, answered, Hast thou appealed unto Caesar? unto Caesar shalt thou go (Acts 25:10-12, emphasis mine). Therefore the evidence suggests that the book of Romans was written at Caesarea during Paul's imprisonment there.*

When we consider all of the arguments for justification by faith, apart from the deeds of the law found in the book of Romans, the book of Romans appears to be the culmination of all of Paul's battles against the Judaizers. It clearly sets forth the doctrine of justification by faith, apart from the deeds of the law, for both the Jews and the Gentiles:

Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour? What if God, willing to shew his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction: and that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory, even us, whom he hath called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles?

As he saith also in [Hosea], I will call them my people, which were not my people; and her beloved, which was not beloved. And it shall come to pass, that in the place where it was said unto them, Ye are not my people; there shall they be called the children of the living God.

[Isaiah] also crieth concerning Israel, Though the number of the children of Israel be as the sand of the sea, a remnant shall be saved: for he will finish the work, and cut it short in righteousness: because a short work will the Lord make upon the earth. And as [Isaiah] said before, Except the Lord of Sabaoth had left us a seed, we had been as Sodoma, and been made like unto Gomorrha.

What shall we say then? That the Gentiles, which followed not after righteousness, have attained to righteousness, even the righteousness which is of faith. But Israel, which followed after the law of righteousness, hath not attained to the law of righteousness. Wherefore? Because they sought it not by faith, but as it were by the works of the law. For they stumbled at that stumblingstone; as it is written, Behold, I lay in Sion a stumblingstone and rock of offence: and whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed.

Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved. For I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge. For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God. For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth.

For Moses describeth the righteousness which is of the law, That the man which doeth those things shall live by them. But the righteousness which is of faith speaketh on

## The Transition

this wise, Say not in thine heart, Who shall ascend into heaven? (that is, to bring Christ down from above:) Or, Who shall descend into the deep? (that is, to bring up Christ again from the dead.) But what saith it? The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thy heart: that is, the word of faith, which we preach; that if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. (Romans 9:21-10:9, emphasis mine)

You may remember that Paul was insistent upon going to Jerusalem despite the warnings he received not to go. There were a series of these warnings, but each one was set aside by Paul as he slowly made his way towards Jerusalem. Finally Agabus prophesied of what would take place in Jerusalem, how that Paul would be bound (Acts 21:10-12). *Then Paul answered, What mean ye to weep and to break mine heart? for I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus. And when he would not be persuaded, we ceased, saying, The will of the Lord be done (Acts 21:13-14, emphasis mine).*

It is inconsistent with Paul's character and with the instructions to Christians, given to him by the Holy Spirit, that Paul would be so overtly disobedient to the will of the Lord. So perhaps Paul was instructed of the Lord to go to Jerusalem and do whatever the brethren commanded him to do, for this would set into action the events that would take place there. I realize that this is pure conjecture. There is no direct statement in Scripture to suggest it, but there must be an explanation for Paul's actions which seem to be a contradiction of principles revealed to him by the Holy Spirit: *Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster (Galatians 3:24-25, emphasis mine).* For Paul to obey the commands of the Jews at Jerusalem, no matter what they were, seems rather drastic; but given the zeal for the law held by James and the brethren at Jerusalem, it seems that nothing less than drastic actions were necessary to change

## The Transition

their minds.

From a human point of view, Paul could have been killed by the Jews when they took him from the temple, and he would have been except for the intervention of God through the Roman garrison. To my mind, given Paul's character revealed in the Scriptures, Paul never would have compromised his position on the relationship of a Christian to the law, but on the surface it seems that he did. Thus, in consideration of our conjecture, God worked out together for good the events that took place in Jerusalem.

I believe the threat to Paul's life was the catalyst that awakened James and the elders in Jerusalem to the understanding of a Hebrew Christian's relationship to the law. Consequently from that point in time, James came to understand the truth that the law, the temple, and the customs (after the crucifixion of Christ) were nothing more than an exercise in dead works. This fact was punctuated by God about ten years later when the Romans destroyed the temple, and the Jews of Jerusalem were starved, killed or carried away captive. From that day the Jews have been without a temple or a nation until they were reconstituted as a nation on May 14, 1948.

Christ fulfilled all of the law on behalf of the believer. Therefore, there was no value in observing any of those things. The religious pride of the Jews had to be brought into subjection to the Word of God, and God used what appeared to be Paul's disobedience to accomplish this, and this allowed the church at Jerusalem to understand its relationship to the law. Consequently the time had come for the Jews to rest in the completed work of Jesus Christ, apart from the deeds of the law:

There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God. For he that is entered into his rest, he also hath ceased from his own works, as God did from his. Let us [be eager]

## The Transition

therefore to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief. (Hebrews 4:9-11, emphasis mine)

After the incident in Jerusalem which nearly cost Paul his life, James and the elders at Jerusalem were compelled to rethink their position. James's letter *to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad* is the result of that rethinking. This is made evident by the fact that James's letter, when properly interpreted in the light of his audience, aligns completely with the truth of grace expressed by Paul and the other New Testament writers. Thus the book of James is a manifesto of the grace of God to the Jews *of the twelve tribes scattered abroad*.

James wished to insure that their faith was truly in the Person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ and not in the dead works of Judaism. This was necessary because of the Jews' continued adherence to their traditions and rituals. Thus we can understand why James used the law to condemn his brethren, so that they would put no confidence in their fleshly observances of law, but that their confidence would be totally in Jesus Christ, where at last through this drastic set of circumstances, James's confidence had come to be.