In this series of lessons we are discovering the differences between the ministry of Paul during the Acts period and his ministry after Acts 28.

It is acknowledged across the wide spectrum of Christianity that at some point in the NT era the nation of Israel was put to one side. We have been showing that Acts 28 records that monumental event. From Genesis 12 to Acts 28, the church Israel and God's purposes for the earth through her were in view.

The Gospel records show that the Lord visited His people Israel, fulfilled all that had been written about Him so far as His rejection, humiliation and suffering for sin and death was concerned, and had risen from the dead. But Israel had not been cast aside at the cross or Acts 2, His rejection was part of God' purposes for Israel and all peoples.

Just as John the Baptist, the Lord and others had called to Israel during the Gospel records, so the Acts period was another 40 year long opportunity for Israel to hear the good news about their Messiah. Only now He was proclaimed as Messiah who had suffered according to prophecy but was now raised and ready to glorify Himself and His People on the earth. The Lord through the prophets had assured Israel if they turned back to Him He would turn back to them and reign out of Zion, see Deut.30:1-6, Is.1:16-19 & Zech.1:3, 14. The Lord, through Peter, repeats this great promise of prophecy to Israel:

Act 3: (13-18),19 Therefore repent and convert so that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from *the* presence of the Lord.
Act 3:20 And He shall send Jesus Christ, who before was proclaimed to you,

We have been taught that the "church" started at the cross or Pentecost but this is a terrible confusion. The Acts period was an opportunity for Israel. Paul's gospel of Acts 13 is so parallel with the earlier one of Peter's it is amazing how so few see it. Look at the Psalm Paul uses for the hope in his gospel presentation in Acts 13 (33):

Psa 2:6 Yea, I have set My king on My holy hill, on Zion.
Psa 2:7 I will declare the decree of Jehovah. He has said to Me, You are My Son; today I have begotten You.
Psa 2:8 Ask of Me, and I shall give the nations for Your inheritance; and the uttermost parts of the earth for Your possession.

When we examine Paul's ministry during the Acts period it is in perfect harmony with Acts 1:8 and was mostly proclaimed in the Jewish synagogues on the Sabbath day. In Acts 13 Paul's gospel declared that Christ as the seed of David had been raised to sit on David's throne and it also included forgiveness of sins and righteousness. Forgiveness of sins and righteousness are both widely proclaimed in the Old Testament Levitical Offerings, in one of the Names of the Lord, Jehovah Tsidkenu (the Lord our righteousness), and in prophecy, see Is.45:25 and 53:7-11.

We also noted last lesson that Paul was imprisoned from Acts 21 through to Acts 28 and he clearly spoke of the spiritual reasons behind this Acts period of bondage. From Acts 28 back to the early days of his Acts period imprisonment, Paul's consistent claim is that he was bound for the hope of Israel and his teaching was in harmony with the Old Testament;

Act 28:20 For this cause, then, I called for you, to see and to speak with you. For I have this chain around me for the hope of Israel.
Act 26:6 And now I stand and am judged for *the* hope of the promise made to our fathers by God,
Act 25:8 ……Neither against the Law of the Jews, nor against the temple, nor against Caesar have I offended in anything.
Act 24:14 But I confess this to you, that after the Way which they call heresy, so I worship the God of my fathers, believing all things that are written in the Law and in the Prophets.

There is no doubt Paul received many revelations during the Acts period, but his testimony clearly shows that up to and during his Acts period imprisonment, he was teaching the doctrines and themes of the Old Testament;

Act 26:19 After this, king Agrippa, I did not disobey the heavenly vision.
Act 26:20 But to those first in Damascus, and Jerusalem, and to all the country of Judea, and to the nations, I made known the command to repent and to turn to God, doing works worthy of repentance
Act 26:21 Because of these things, having caught me in the temple, The Jews tried to kill me.
Act 26:22 Then having obtained help from God, I stand until this day, witnessing both to small and great, saying no other things than those which the prophets and Moses said was going to happen;
Act 26:23 whether the Christ was liable to suffer, whether first by a resurrection of the dead He was going to proclaim light to the people and to the nations.

Now let us look closely at the statements by Paul after Acts 28 as to the spiritual reasons of his imprisonment. The differences are significant;

Eph 3:1 For this cause, I, Paul, am the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you nations,
Eph 3:2 if you have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which is given to me toward you,
Eph 3:3 that by revelation He made known to me the mystery

Here is a significant change. Paul is now the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the nations or Gentiles. Not once in the post Acts letters does Paul state that we Gentiles are to provoke Israel to jealousy, see Deut. 32:21, Roms.10:19, 11:11-14. Not once is prophecy used to disclose God's purpose for us nations. He is not bound for the hope of Israel nor bound for accusations against him for offending Israel, the Temple or Caesar. Paul goes on to say in this chapter;
Eph 3:8 This grace is given to me (who am less than the least of all saints) to preach the gospel of the unsearchable riches of Christ among the nations,
Eph 3:9 and to bring to light what is the fellowship of the mystery which from eternity has been hidden in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ;

Paul's imprisonment after Acts 28 is associated with a ministry of hidden purpose. The riches of Christ in the post Acts letters are unsearchable. We will compare some of these riches in a later lesson but for now let us find Paul confirming that the purpose of God for today is associated with this later period of his bondage;
Eph 6:19 ..pray for me, that utterance may be given to me, that I may open my mouth boldly to make known the mystery of the gospel,
Eph 6:20 for which I am an ambassador in bonds; so that in it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak.

In Colossians we read again of Paul's suffering in prison and the dispensation given to Paul that was hidden away from ages and generations. Look at the double filling up in this passage;
Col 1:24 who now rejoice in my sufferings on your behalf, and I fill up the things lacking of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh, on behalf of His body, which *is* the church;
Col 1:25 of which I became a minister, according to the administration of God given to me for you, to fulfill the Word of God;
Col 1:26 the mystery which has been hidden from ages and from generations, but now has been revealed to His saints.
Col 1:27 *For to them* God would make known what *are* the riches of the glory of this mystery among the nations, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory,

It is true Paul suffered during the Acts period but his post Acts suffering is additional. In Acts 20:22-27 Paul was journeying to Jerusalem and he expected to die there. Paul anticipated that his sufferings and ministry of the Acts dispensation were to conclude in the city which was the centre of his hope. But God had another purpose which was revealed to Paul after Acts 28. This hidden purpose was linked with this "extra" suffering Paul had to endure; it filled up his sufferings which he had thought were near completion. But please notice the parallel in Colossians 1 above, Paul's suffering was filled up and the present dispensation given to him fills up the Word of God.

The words "fill up" in verse 24 and the words "to fulfill" in verse 25 have as their base in the original language the word "pleroo" which is translated "complete" in Col.2:10.

Here is another link between Paul's post Acts suffering and the truth for today;
Col 4:2 Continue in prayer and watch in it with thanksgiving,
Col 4:3 praying together about us also, that God may open to us a door of the Word, to speak the mystery of Christ, for which I also have been bound,

And again;
2Ti 1:8 Therefore you should not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor *of* me His prisoner. But be partaker of the afflictions of the gospel according to *the* power of God,
2Ti 1:9 who has saved us and called *us* with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given us in Christ Jesus before the eternal times.

There is a difference in Paul's prison sufferings. During Acts he was bound for the purposes of God through Israel; he was bound for that hope. After Acts 28, the Lord revealed to Paul another purpose which went back before Abraham, before the foundation of the world. This purpose had been hidden in God, was not disclosed through the prophets. Paul's post Acts prison ministry filled up the sufferings the Lord told him he would endure and associated with these additional sufferings was the additional revelation of the present dispensation and the calling of today.

To conclude this lesson it must be noted that our Lord was rejected and suffered at the hands of His people Israel during the gospels and continued to be rejected up to the end of the book of Acts. Is it any different now, after Acts 28? No it isn't. Our Lord, the Head, is rejected by the nations as well. Thus our Lord's sufferings have been filled up as well.

Praise our God for the wonderful discoveries we make when we test or distinguish the things differing.