

The Relationship between Israel's Repentance and the Kingdom of God

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The purpose of this paper is to examine the connection between national Israel's repentance and the kingdom of God. The thesis promoted here is that the kingdom's coming to earth is connected with and contingent upon Israel's repentance.¹ God is sovereign over all matters, and His universal kingdom extends over all, yet He has determined that the arrival of the coming mediatorial kingdom on earth is closely related to Israel's turning from sin and unbelief. This position, that the kingdom's timing is related to national Israel's repentance, is not popular and is often rejected. For example, the amillennial theologian, Kim Riddlebarger states, "But the New Testament knows nothing of a kingdom offered and kingdom withdrawn according to the whims of unbelieving Israel."² Yet the biblical evidence for the kingdom being related to Israel's repentance is strong, with multiple passages supporting it in both testaments. This is an oft-neglected truth, even among those who affirm a future for national Israel. Yet it is an important part of the Bible's storyline.

Contingency and Nations (Jeremiah 18:1–11)

Jeremiah 18 is strategic for the biblical concept of contingency in God's dealing with nations. Here we find conditions for blessings explicitly taught. This chapter reveals how God responds to nations and emphasizes both God's sovereignty and His varied responses to nations based on their actions toward Him. The context of Jeremiah 18 is God's use of the potter and clay analogy:

The word which came to Jeremiah from the LORD saying, "Arise and go down to the potter's house, and there I will announce My words to you." Then I went down to the potter's house, and there he was, making something on the wheel. But the vessel that he was making of clay was spoiled in the hand of the potter; so he remade it into another vessel, as it pleased the potter to make (Jer 18:1–4).

The potter and clay analogy emphasizes God's sovereignty and the Creator's superiority and control over His creatures. This analogy is an important part of Paul's argument in Romans 9 where Paul explains God's sovereignty with His saving purposes (Rom 9:20–23). Then the potter and clay analogy is related to Israel:

Then the word of the LORD came to me saying, "Can I not, O house of Israel, deal with you as this potter does?" declares the LORD. "Behold, like the clay in the potter's hand, so are you in My hand, O house of Israel. At one moment I might speak concerning a nation or concerning a kingdom to uproot, to pull down, or to destroy it; if that nation against which I have spoken turns from its evil, I will relent concerning the calamity I planned to bring on it. Or at another moment I might speak concerning a nation or concerning a kingdom to build up or to plant it; if it does evil in My sight by not obeying My voice, then I will think better of the good with which I had promised to bless it. So now then, speak to the men of Judah and against the inhabitants of Jerusalem saying, 'Thus says the LORD, "Behold, I am fashioning calamity against you and devising a plan against you. Oh turn back, each of you from his evil way, and reform your ways and your deeds"' (Jer 18:5–11).

¹ By contingency we mean that certain conditions must occur before an event can happen.

² Kim Riddlebarger, *A Case for Amillennialism: Understanding the End Times* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 103.

Particularly important is the statement that God might declare calamity upon a nation, yet if that nation repents of its evil then God will “relent concerning the calamity” He predicted (vv. 7–8) In other words, if a nation repents, God will not bring judgment upon that nation. Likewise, God might speak of blessing for a nation, yet if that nation does evil in God’s sight, then God will not bring blessing. So then, *by God’s sovereign design the response of a nation can influence God’s dealings with that nation*. As Toussaint observes in regard to Jeremiah 18, “Here the response of a nation to God’s prophecy may affect its future.”³

One clear example of this principle is found in Jonah. The prophet Jonah prophesied that Nineveh would be destroyed in forty days—“Yet forty days and Nineveh will be overthrown” (Jon 3:4). But the people of Nineveh and their king “believed in God” and repented (Jon 3:5–9). As a result, God relented concerning his judgment upon them: “When God saw their deeds, that they turned from their wicked way, then God relented concerning the calamity which He had declared He would bring upon them. And He did not do it” (Jon 3:10). Judgment was predicted for Nineveh in forty days, yet Nineveh repented and justice was delayed.

Compare the principle in Jeremiah 18 with what occurs in Jonah 3:

Jeremiah 18:8: “if that nation against which I have spoken turns from its evil, I will relent concerning the calamity I planned to bring on it.”

Jonah 3:10: “When God saw their deeds, that they turned from their wicked way, then God relented concerning the calamity which He had declared He would bring upon them. And He did not do it” (Jon 3:10).

On multiple occasions the OT prophets declared that national repentance on Israel’s part would bring kingdom blessings and reinstatement to the blessings of the Abrahamic covenant:

Lev 26:40–45:

“If they [Israel] confess their iniquity . . .

“Then I will remember my covenant with Jacob . . . and I will remember the land.”

Jer 3:12–18:

“Return, faithless Israel,’ declares the LORD . . .

“Then I will give you . . . (shepherds to feed, prosperity in the land, God’s presence, nations coming to Jerusalem, unification of Israel)

2 Chron 7:13–14:

“If . . . My people . . . humble themselves and pray and seek My face and turn from their wicked ways

“then I will hear from heaven, will forgive their sin and will heal their land.”

Note the cause and effect relationship above. If Israel repents then God blesses Israel. These passages assume Israel’s disobedience and consequences for covenant betrayal. But hope exists. If Israel repents

³ Stanley Toussaint, “The Contingency of the Coming of the Kingdom,” in *Integrity of Heart, Skillfulness of Hands: Biblical and Leadership Studies in Honor of Donald K. Campbell*, eds. Charles H. Dyer and Roy B. Zuck (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 225.

then kingdom blessings will arrive and a reversal of circumstances will occur. This includes spiritual salvation and physical prosperity, including the land.

The concept of contingency resurfaces again in Jer 4:1–2, but this time in regard to what Israel’s repentance means for the nations. Israel’s repentance will lead to blessings for the nations:

“If you will return, O Israel,” declares the LORD . . .

then the nations will bless themselves in Him, and in Him they will glory.

This reaffirms the truth of Gen 12:2–3 and 22:18 that God’s plans are mediated through the nation Israel, but they also extend to Gentile nations. Israel needs to know that their obedience or disobedience affects others as well as themselves. In this case Israel’s repentance can lead to blessings for the nations. This is something Paul explicitly states in Rom 11:12, 15 where Israel’s belief leads to greater blessings for the world.

Contingency and the Kingdom (Leviticus 26)

Leviticus 26 discusses the relationship between the Abrahamic and Mosaic covenants and predicts consequences to Israel for both obedience and disobedience. This chapter also reveals how Israel can once again experience the blessings of the Abrahamic covenant after judgment and dispersion.

Verses 1–13 promise blessings for obedience. If Israel walks in God’s statutes and obeys His commandments the people will be blessed in every way. They will experience national prosperity including abundant rain and harvests. The people will not fear wild animals or hostile people groups. They will also enjoy God’s special presence—“I will also walk among you and be your God, and you shall be My people” (26:12). In short, obedience to the Mosaic law will keep Israel connected to the blessings of the Abrahamic covenant. This highlights the truth that Israel’s obedience to the Mosaic law was the God-intended means for Israel to remain in the blessings of the Abrahamic covenant.

Yet Leviticus 26 also spells out devastating curses for disobedience (26:14–39). These include a reversal of all the blessings described in Lev 26:1–13. This also involves removal from the land of promise and dispersion to the nations:

“But you will perish among the nations, and your enemies’ land will consume you. So those of you who may be left will rot away because of their iniquity in the lands of your enemies. . . .” (Lev 26:38–39).

In short, disobedience to the law means removal from the blessings of the Abrahamic covenant. The warning concerning removal from the land and captivity to other nations is shocking. After all, the people were dramatically rescued from captivity in Egypt. Would captivity really happen again? And would God do this to His people, Israel? Yes. Israel would not be exempt from punishment for disobedience. As Barrick rightly notes, “The nation’s apathy toward Yahweh and His covenants would result in God making them landless again. In order to cure their selective amnesia, Yahweh would return them to the bondage from which He had delivered them.”⁴

But Israel’s encounter with captivity will not be permanent. Divine retribution has the goal of repentance. Verses 40–45 discuss a conditional element that, when satisfied, leads to a reversal of Israel’s banishment to the nations. This section assumes a coming dispersion of Israel to the nations. But God declares that “if” the people repent and come to Him in faith, then He will restore Israel and place them again in the blessings of the Abrahamic covenant:

⁴ William D. Barrick, “The Eschatological Significance of Leviticus 26,” *The Master’s Seminary Journal* 16:1 (Spring 2005): 99. Brueggemann states, “It is hard enough for landed people to believe land will be lost. It is harder to imagine Yahweh will do it.” Walter Brueggemann, *The Land: Place as Gift, Promise, and Challenge in Biblical Faith* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977), 113.

“If they confess their iniquity and the iniquity of their forefathers, in their unfaithfulness which they committed against Me, and also in their acting with hostility against Me—I also was acting with hostility against them, to bring them into the land of their enemies—or if their uncircumcised heart becomes humbled so that they then make amends for their iniquity, then I will remember My covenant with Jacob, and I will remember also My covenant with Isaac, and My covenant with Abraham as well, and I will remember the land” (Lev 26:40–42).

The return to blessing does not happen automatically. Israel must repent with a humble and contrite heart. There needs to be national repentance and acknowledgement that not only the current generation sinned, but those before sinned, too. If Israel does this God will remember His covenant with Abraham. This return to the blessings of the Abrahamic covenant includes “the land” which God remembers to give Israel (v. 43). Just as the consequences of Israel’s disobedience involve dispersion to other lands, repentance will lead to restoration in the land of promise. To compare (→ = “results in”):

Israel’s disobedience → Israel being taken captive in the land of their enemies

Followed by:

Israel’s repentance → Israel returning to the land of promise

The reason there must be a restoration of Israel to the promised land is because God must be faithful to His promises of the Abrahamic covenant:

“Yet in spite of this, when they are in the land of their enemies, I will not reject them, nor will I so abhor them as to destroy them, breaking My covenant with them; for I am the LORD their God. But I will remember for them the covenant with their ancestors, whom I brought out of the land of Egypt in the sight of the nations, that I might be their God. I am the LORD” (Lev 26:44–45).

If God were to leave Israel in permanent dispersion this would mean God broke His unconditional covenant with Abraham. But that cannot happen. Instead, God will “remember” His covenant with Israel’s ancestors and bring Israel back to their promised land. That God connects this promise with what He did for Israel is also important. As Barrick points out, “The Land-Giver and Exodus-Causer will always be loyal to His covenants and to His covenant people.”⁵

Paul will later reaffirm God’s covenant faithfulness to Israel in Romans 11. After declaring that a day is coming when “all Israel will be saved” (Rom 11:26), he ties this with God’s faithfulness: “but from the standpoint of God’s choice they [Israel] are beloved for the sake of the fathers; for the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable” (11:28b–29). Paul’s statement concerning God’s faithfulness to Israel coincides with what God promised in Leviticus 26.

Looking to the future, the question must be asked, “Is Israel’s repentance a precondition to the establishment of the Messianic Kingdom?” The answer is, Yes. “The restoration of Israel from worldwide dispersion will depend upon repentance (cf. Jer 3:11–18; Hos 5:13–6:3; Zech 12:1–10).”⁶ Arnold Fruchtenbaum argues that “confession of Israel’s national sin” is “a major precondition that must be met before Christ will return to establish the Messianic Kingdom.”⁷ This backdrop helps with understanding

⁵ Barrick, “The Eschatological Significance of Leviticus 26,” 97.

⁶ Ibid., 124.

⁷ Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, *Israelology: The Missing Link in Systematic Theology* (Tustin, CA: Ariel Ministries Press, 1989), 784, 781. Saucy writes, “This restoration is conditioned on the confession and humbling of the hearts of the people, but the final outcome is assured.” Robert L. Saucy, *The Case for Progressive Dispensationalism: The Interface between Dispensational & Non-Dispensational Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993), 222.

the significance of Jesus' declaration, "Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matt 4:17). Jesus will call for national repentance which is necessary for the arrival of the kingdom.

Deuteronomy 4:25–31 and 30:1–10

Both Deuteronomy 4 and 30 expand upon Moses' words in Leviticus 26. With Deut 4:25–28, God predicted that future generations of Israel would disobey God's commands and be dispersed to the nations in judgment. But 4:29–31 declares that repentance would lead to restoration in the latter days:

But from there [the nations] you will seek the LORD your God, and you will find Him if you search for Him with all your heart and all your soul. When you are in distress and all these things have come upon you, **in the latter days you will return to the LORD your God and listen to His voice.** For the LORD your God is a compassionate God; He will not fail you nor destroy you nor forget the covenant with your fathers which He swore to them.

While this section does not explicitly offer an "If . . . then" scenario, one is implied. Israel's volitional choice to disobey God will be the reason for dispersion to the nations. Likewise seeking the Lord and searching for Him will be a volitional choice as well. Turning to the Lord ("return") will mean a reconnection with the blessings of the Abrahamic covenant.

What was predicted in in Lev 26:40–45 and Deut 4:25–31 is expanded upon in Deut 30:1–10. We start with verses 1–5:

"So it shall be when all of these things have come upon you, the blessing and the curse which I have set before you, and you call them to mind in all nations where the LORD your God has banished you, and you return to the LORD your God and obey Him with all your heart and soul according to all that I command you today, you and your sons, then the LORD your God will restore you from captivity, and have compassion on you, and will gather you again from all the peoples where the LORD your God has scattered you. If your outcasts are at the ends of the earth, from there the LORD your God will gather you, and from there He will bring you back. The LORD your God will bring you into the land which your fathers possessed, and you shall possess it; and He will prosper you and multiply you more than your fathers.

Israel's dispersion to the nations will be reversed if/when "you return to the Lord" (v. 2). When that occurs "then" (v. 3) God "will restore" Israel from captivity and bring the people into the land. God will cause them to prosper. While the word "kingdom" is not mentioned, these are clearly kingdom conditions.

Verse 6 is significant since Israel's choice to "return" to the Lord for kingdom blessings, is because of God's enabling: "Moreover the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, to love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, so that you may live." This promise anticipates the promise of the New covenant in Jer 31:31–34 which also stresses the giving of a new heart by God as the basis for covenant blessings. God will circumcise Israel's heart so that the people can love and obey God as they should. Deuteronomy 30, therefore, covers both sides of the God's sovereignty and human responsibility issue. Israel will turn to God in repentance and faith, yet as they do so it is because God changes their hearts. Verses 8–9 further describes kingdom blessings for Israel as a result of their repentance:

And you shall again obey the LORD, and observe all His commandments which I command you today. Then the LORD your God will prosper you abundantly in all the work of your hand, in the offspring of your body and in the offspring of your cattle and in the produce of your ground, for the LORD will again rejoice over you for good, just as He rejoiced over your fathers.

Jeremiah 3:12–18

Jeremiah 3:12–18 foretells a coming united Israel that will experience kingdom blessings as a result of turning to the Lord. God sent Jeremiah with a message to the northern kingdom of Israel that was taken captive by the Assyrians: “Return, faithless Israel,” declares the LORD; “I will not look upon you in anger. For I am gracious” (3:12). The term “return” (*shub*) carries the meaning of repentance. Thus, the condition for forgiveness was repentance. Israel needed to acknowledge its iniquities and admit that the nation “transgressed against the LORD” (3:13).⁸ If Israel does this the LORD will take them from cities where they were scattered and “bring you to Zion” (3:14). Kingdom conditions for Israel are contingent on Israel turning back to the Lord.

That Jeremiah is discussing future times is evident by the words “in those days” (3:16) and “at that time” (3:17). Verse 16 promises two things for Israel. First, Israel will be “multiplied and increased in the land.” So God plans for Israel to experience physical blessings in their homeland. Second, there will be no need for the ark of the covenant—“They shall say no more, ‘The ark of the covenant of the LORD.’ And it shall not come to mind, nor shall they remember it, nor shall they miss it, nor shall it be made again” (3:16). The ark represented the presence of God, yet in the future the presence of God will be with His people even more directly. Also, this shows a transition in the last days away from the Mosaic covenant, of which the ark of the covenant was central, to the New covenant (see Jer 31:31–34). Since the New covenant replaces the Mosaic covenant, there is no longer need for the prestigious ark representing the old covenant.⁹

The kingly nature of this period is clear since Jerusalem will be called “The Throne of the Lord” (3:17). But this kingdom is not just for Israel since Jeremiah says, “all the nations will be gathered to it” (3:17). Again this shows that Israel’s kingdom is not just for Israel but for all nations that walk by the ways of the Lord. Israel is a means for blessing the nations and is not an end in itself. This kingdom period will be characterized by heart obedience since the people will no longer walk by their stubborn hearts (3:17).

Harmony in Israel characterizes this period as “the house of Judah will walk with the house of Israel, and they will come together from the land of the north to the land that I gave your fathers as an inheritance” (3:18). For the first time since Solomon’s reign, Israel will be united and the tribes will be at peace with each other. This unification is in the “land” God promised to Israel’s fathers. Even after division and dispersion of the tribes of Israel the expectation of a literal land is still part of Israel’s hope. After captivity the prophets are still speaking of a future land for Israel.

In sum, this passage shows that temporary judgment for disobedience does not mean God is done with the nation Israel. Blessings will come to Israel, yet these blessings are contingent on Israel’s repentance.

Israel’s Repentance Leads to Blessings for the Nations (Jeremiah 4:1–2)

Contingency resurfaces in Jer 4:1–2. Whereas, Jer 3:12–18 emphasized kingdom blessings for Israel if national repentance transpired, Jeremiah 4 reveals that Israel’s repentance will lead to blessings for the nations:

“If you will return, O Israel,” declares the LORD . . .

then the nations will bless themselves in Him, and in Him they will glory.

⁸ “While God offers to allow Israel to return (vv. 12, 14), the offer does carry conditions (v. 13). Guilt and covenant disobedience need to be acknowledged, and Israel’s return needs to be with ‘her whole heart.’” John Martin Bracke, *Jeremiah 1–29*, Westminster Bible Companion (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 2000), 39.

⁹ Kaiser says, “The Ark of the Covenant, traditionally the throne of God, would now be replaced by Jerusalem, the new throne of God.” Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., “Evidence from Jeremiah,” in *A Case for Premillennialism: A New Consensus*, ed. Donald K. Campbell and Jeffrey L. Townsend (Chicago: Moody Press, 1992), 107.

This reaffirms the truth of Gen 12:2–3 and 22:18 that God’s plans include the nation Israel, but they also extend to Gentile nations. Israel needs to know that their obedience or disobedience affects others as well as themselves. In this case, Israel’s repentance can lead to the salvation of the Gentiles.

Hosea

Israel’s repentance leading to the kingdom is taught in Hosea. Hosea 3:4–5 explicitly states that Israel will go for many days without a king but then repent and experience God’s blessings:

For the sons of Israel will remain for many days without king or prince, without sacrifice or sacred pillar and without ephod or household idols. Afterward the sons of Israel will return and seek the LORD their God and David their king; and they will come trembling to the LORD and to His goodness in the last days.

Hosea 5:15–6:1 also has implications for Israel’s repentance and the kingdom:

“I will go away and return to My place
Until they acknowledge their guilt and seek My face;
In their affliction they will earnestly seek Me.”
Come, let us return to the LORD.
For He has torn us, but He will heal us;
He has wounded us, but He will bandage us.

Together, this passage (Hos 5:15–6:1–3) indicates that acknowledgement of guilt (repentance) and seeking God’s face (belief) during a time of affliction will lead to God’s favor and blessing for Israel. The statement, “I will go away and return to My place,” could refer to the Messiah who returns to heaven after a time on earth. This would coincide with the incarnation of Jesus. Jesus came to Israel presenting the kingdom. Yet the people did not believe (see Matt 11:20–24). Jesus returned to heaven until the time of Israel’s national repentance (see Matt 23:37–39; Acts 3:19–21).

“Repent for the Kingdom of Heaven Is at Hand” (Matt 3:2; 4:17; 10:5)

The theme of Israel’s repentance being connected with the kingdom is found in the New Testament. The message of Jesus and John the Baptist can be summarized in one statement—“Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand”:

Now in those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the wilderness of Judea, saying, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matt 3:1–2).

From that time Jesus began to preach and say, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matt 4:17).

The apostles also preached the nearness of the kingdom in relation to Israel’s repentance:

These twelve Jesus sent out after instructing them: “Do not go in the way of the Gentiles, and do not enter any city of the Samaritans; but rather go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. And as you go, preach, saying, ‘The kingdom of heaven is at hand’” (Matt 10:5–7).

While the Matt 10:5–7 does not mention “repent,” repentance was part of the message. For in Matt 11:20 we are told, “Then He [Jesus] began to denounce the cities in which most of His miracles were done,

because they did not repent.” So the message of the kingdom to the cities of Israel was offered with repentance as a necessary condition.

The prophesied kingdom was on the brink. The mention to “at hand” means impending. Not arrival, but nearness. The kingdom was impending so Israel needed to be ready; they needed to repent. It would not be bestowed simply based on ethnicity. Being a physical Jew was not enough. Repentance was the prerequisite for entrance into the kingdom. With John 3:3 Jesus declared, “unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.” While there is a close relationship between salvation and the kingdom, the two are not the same thing. We cannot say “salvation is the kingdom,” or “the kingdom is salvation.” The kingdom of God is a broader concept than human salvation. One must be saved in order to enter the kingdom. Thus, *salvation is the qualification for entrance into the kingdom.*

Our contention is that “Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” statements are reliant upon the theological truth found in Lev 26:40–45; Deut 4:25–31; Deut 30:1–10; Jer 3:12–18; Jer 4:1–2; and 2 Chron 7:13–14, namely that Israel’s repentance means Israel’s restoration to Abrahamic covenant blessings and the kingdom of God. The word “Repent” coincides with the Hebrew term—“return (*shub*). Thus, the call to repent for the kingdom is at hand is a call to Israel to return to the Lord so they can experience kingdom blessings.¹⁰

Lev 26:40–45

Deut 4:25–31

Deut 30:1–10 → Matt 3:2; 4:17; 10:7 “Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand”

Jer 3:12–18

Jer 4:1–2;

2 Chron 7:13–14

Hos 3; 5:15–16

Consequences for Missing Visitation (Luke 19:41–44)

Luke 19:41–44 is strategic for understanding the relationship of Israel’s repentance to the kingdom program. As Jesus approached Jerusalem, announces consequences for Israel’s unbelief. Matthew 11:20–24 revealed that the cities of Israel had not repented. Matthew 12 showed that the leaders of Israel rejected Jesus the King, attributing His miracles to Satan (Matt 12:24). As a result, Israel’s refusal to repent and believe in Jesus meant the kingdom would not be established at this time. Instead, judgment for Israel was impending. Verse 41 states: “When He approached Jerusalem, He saw the city and wept over it.” As Jesus approached Jerusalem eastward from the Mount of Olives for the short remainder of the travel to Jerusalem He was sorrowful. Verses 42–44 tell us why:

[Jesus] saying, “If you had known in this day, even you, the things which make for peace! But now they have been hidden from your eyes. For the days will come upon you when your enemies will throw up a barricade against you, and surround you and hem you in on every side, and they will level you to the ground and your children within you, and they will not leave in you one stone upon another, because you did not recognize the time of your visitation.”

The reason for this emotional display was Jesus’ sorrow for Israel. He weeps for Israel like a parent weeping for a lost or wayward child. Israel’s rejection of Messiah will result in terrible consequences.

Jesus declares the significance about “this day”: “If you had known in this day, even you, the things which make for peace” (v. 42). The reference to “this day” is emphatic and reveals something unique about this day. This day had the potential to bring “things which make for peace.” Kingdom blessings most probably are in view. This “peace” must be more than just individual salvation. He is

¹⁰ The kingdom’s nearness is linked to the person of Jesus the Messiah who is the King standing in their midst (see Luke 17:20–21).

addressing the people of Israel as a whole. Plus, the *consequences* for unbelief here are national and physical. It is a disastrous destruction of the city, a calamity that would occur in A.D 70 when the Romans utterly destroyed Jerusalem. So if the consequences for unbelief are national and physical, so too must the offer of blessings be national and physical as well.¹¹

Jesus declared that peace could have come to Israel. Instead, peace will be “hidden” and judgment will come. Enemies will surround Jerusalem and utterly destroy the city. Why?—“because you did not recognize the time of your visitation.” Israel’s visitation was the appearance of her Messiah and the kingdom He presented. Yet they did not respond properly. Salvation and restoration were before her, but she refused.¹²

So how does Luke 19:41–44 relate to the kingdom of God? Previously, Jesus revealed the kingdom of God would not be established until he travelled to a distant country (heaven) and then returned (Luke 19:11–27). Now we are told there could have been “peace.” Peace here refers to the kingdom blessings promised in the OT. Of course, spiritual salvation would be at the heart of this peace, but this peace would include peace, security, and prosperity for Jerusalem and Israel. Part of the reason why physical peace and prosperity are in view with Jesus’ words is because of the opposite consequences now facing Jerusalem because of unbelief. Since Israel rejected her Messiah, the consequences would be a literal destruction of the city. Thus, it is fair to conclude that just as there would be a literal destruction of the city of Jerusalem for unbelief, there also could have been peace and security for Jerusalem if they accepted her Messiah. To put it another way:

- National belief could lead to national peace.
- National unbelief leads to national catastrophe.

In sum, Luke 19:41–44 reveals that with Jesus’ first coming there was a genuine presentation of kingdom blessings to the people of Israel. These kingdom blessings were linked with their acceptance of the King. This must be the case because Jesus wept over Israel’s choice and the consequences for her rejecting Him. They are held responsible for not accepting their Messiah. As McClain asserts, “The historic fact that Israel did not receive Him, however, subtracts nothing from the reality of the offer and the divinely imposed obligation.”¹³ Yet as Brent Kinman points out, the judgment of Luke 19:41–44 is not permanent: “Jesus’ announcement at 19:41–44 need not represent a definitive or final break between God and Israel—as in the Old Testament, the aim of chastisement visited upon Jerusalem is restoration.”¹⁴ As terrible as the coming judgment will be, hope for the nation remains (see Luke 21:24b).

Hope for Jerusalem in the Midst of Judgment (Matt 23:37–39)

Coming off His eight woes to the religious leaders of Israel Jesus presents a picture of both judgment and hope for Jerusalem in Matt 23:37–39. Jesus rebukes the people of Jerusalem for killing the prophets. This was tragic since Jesus, in tenderness, stated that He wanted to gather the Jewish people “the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings.” This again shows that Jesus presented a genuine offer of blessing to the Jewish people. The problem, though, rested with obstinate Israel —“You were

¹¹ “In Luke’s mind, this would have meant primarily equity among all people (1:48–53), a change of government (1:52 cf 19:38), a fulfilment of Isaiah’s prophecy (4:21), restitution by the rich (3:10–14 cf 18:22) and a reversal of social roles (cf 22:24–27).” McGlory Speckman, “The Kairos behind the Kairos Document: A Contextual Exegesis of Luke 19:41–44,” *Religion & Theology* 5.2 (1998): 214.

¹² Some scholars have postulated that “this day” and “visitation” is connected with the fulfillment of the Dan 9:25 prophecy where Messiah the Prince is predicted to come to Israel at the end of the sixty-ninth week of Daniel. Harold Hoehner claims that the sixty-ninth week of Daniel expired exactly on the day of the Triumphal Entry of Jesus into Jerusalem. If this is the case, “this day” could have prophetic significance back to Daniel 9. See Harold W. Hoehner, *Chronological Aspects of the Life of Christ* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978).

¹³ McClain, *The Greatness of the Kingdom*, 353.

¹⁴ Brent Kinman, *Jesus’ Entry into Jerusalem in the Context of Lukan Theology and the Politics of His Day* (New York: Brill, 1995),

unwilling” (Matt 23:37). This unwillingness points to Israel’s volitional refusal to believe in Christ and parallels Jesus’ statement in Luke that they missed their “time of visitation” (Luke 19:44).

Because Israel killed the prophets and now were rejecting the Messiah, destruction would come: “Behold your house is being left to you desolate!” (Matt 23:38). Like Luke 19:41–44, this too is a prediction of the coming destruction of Jerusalem and its temple that would occur in A.D. 70.

Jesus’ next statement is strategic concerning the kingdom program and Israel’s place in it. This judgment for Israel’s unbelief will someday be reversed: “For I say to you, from now on you will not see Me until you say, ‘BLESSED IS HE WHO COMES IN THE NAME OF THE LORD!’” This statement has been understood in three ways. The first is that the declaration of “Blessed is He . . .” is a cry of a reluctant and unsaved Israel at the time of its judgment. Allegedly, Israel will be forced to acknowledge that Jesus is the Messiah. John Calvin stated, “He [Jesus] will not come to them [the Jews] until they cry out in fear—too late—at the sight of His Majesty.”¹⁵

But this view is unnecessarily pessimistic. As Graham Stanton points out, “the difficulty with this interpretation is that Ps. 118:26 which is cited in Matt. 23:39 is surely an expression of joyful praise rather than of fear or mourning.”¹⁶ Jesus quotes Ps 118:26a, which is hopeful concerning Israel’s relationship to God. The last part of Ps 118:26 states, “We have blessed you from the house of the LORD.” This is a happy and willing declaration from people who know the Lord, not the words of a reluctant group on their way to judgment. Craig Evans points out that “The rabbis understood Ps 118:26 in reference to the day of redemption.”¹⁷ This negative judgment view also is in conflict with various Scripture passages like Zech 12:10 and Rom 11:26–27 which speak of a coming positive response of the nation Israel to her Messiah.

A second view is that Jesus’ words are an unqualified, straightforward prediction of Israel’s salvation in a coming day. While the current generation had not believed and was facing national calamity, a coming generation of Israel will cry out in embracement of her Messiah. Craig S. Keener notes the hope in this passage:

This passage reminds us that God does not forget his promises to his people. . . . Matthew places it among the woes of coming judgment, but in so doing transforms this into a promise of future hope. . . . Israel’s restoration was a major theme of the biblical prophets and reappeared at least occasionally in early Christianity (Rom 11:26), though the emphasis of early Christian apologetic came to focus on the Gentile mission.¹⁸

This view has more going for it than the first. Other passages of Scripture predict a future salvation and restoration of Israel. But there is another perspective, a third option that fits even better. This is the conditional coming view. With this, Israel believes and then Jesus comes. In his study of Matt 23:39 and Luke 13:35b, Dale Allison argues that Jesus’ words include a “conditional” element and are more than an unqualified and straightforward declaration of salvation for Israel.¹⁹ Yes, the deliverance of Israel would occur. But there is a contingency element to this statement that highlights the importance of Israel’s belief as a condition for Jesus’ return and kingdom blessings. This view does more justice to the context. Judgment for unbelief is probably not followed by an unconditional statement of salvation but a call for belief so that Israel can experience Jesus’ return. As Allison puts it:

¹⁵ John Calvin, *A Harmony of the Gospels Matthew, Mark and Luke, and James and Jude* vol. 3, trans. A.W. Morrison, (Edinburgh: The Saint Andrews Press, 1972), 71.

¹⁶ Graham Stanton, *A Gospel for a New People: Studies in Matthew* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1992), 249.

¹⁷ Craig Evans, “Prophecy and Polemic: Jews in Luke’s Scriptural Apologetic,” in *Luke and Scripture: The Function of Sacred Tradition in Luke–Acts*, eds. Craig A. Evans and James A. Sanders (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 179, n. 33.

¹⁸ Craig S. Keener, *Matthew*, The IVP New Testament Commentary Series (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1997), 341.

¹⁹ Dale C. Allison Jr., “Matt. 23:39 = Luke 13:35b As a Conditional Prophecy,” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 18 (1983):

The text then means not, when the Messiah comes, his people will bless him, but rather, when his people bless him, the Messiah will come. In other words, the date of the redemption is contingent upon Israel's acceptance of the person and work of Jesus.²⁰

Allison's point is not that Jesus comes first and then Israel believes. Rather Jesus' coming is contingent on Israel's acceptance of Jesus. He offers several reasons for this contingency perspective. The first is that "belief in the contingency of the time of the final redemption is well-attested in Jewish sources of the second century and later."²¹ Second, the word "until" (*eos*) "can indicate a contingent state in Greek sentences in which the realization of the apodosis is dependent upon the realization of the protasis."²² This means the Greek term *eos* "is not simply temporal" as in the sense of "until" but "properly conditional," more in the sense of "unless."²³ Thus, the people of Jerusalem will not see Jesus "unless/until" they say "Blessed is He . . ." Third, Allison holds that the structure of Matt 23:39 "argues for the conditional interpretation."²⁴ He points out that several Jewish eschatological passages carry a conditional element along with an eschatological event. The structure is:

- (a) statement about the messianic advent with adverbial particle of negation attached ("The Son of David will not come")
- (b) conditional particle (עד)
- (c) condition to be met (in Israel) for fulfillment of the messianic advent (e.g., "no conceited men in Israel")²⁵

He then points out that Matt. 23:39 (along with Luke 13:35b) "can be analyzed as having precisely the same structure":

- (a) statement about the messianic advent with adverbial particle of negation attached ("You will not see me," "me" being Jesus, the Messiah)
- (b) conditional particle (εως)
- (c) condition to be met (in Israel) for fulfillment of the messianic advent (those in Jerusalem utter, "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord," and thereby acknowledge the person and work of Jesus).²⁶

Allison then summarizes this point: "It therefore appears that the synoptic verse sets forth, in a traditional fashion, a condition for the great redemption."²⁷

Fourth, Allison argues that the conditional view avoids the "pitfalls" of the other two options and is a better fit contextually. A permanent rejection of Israel does not fit the context of Matthew or the Bible. Also, an unqualified statement of future salvation is not satisfactory because just as there was a volitional rejection of Jesus, there must be a willing acceptance of Him to experience the blessings of His return.

²⁰ Ibid., 77.

²¹ Ibid. He lists many examples in pages 77–78.

²² Ibid., 78.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid., 79.

²⁵ Ibid. On this page he offers several such examples.

²⁶ Ibid., 78–79.

²⁷ Ibid., 80.

Thus, the better view is the “contingency” perspective in which Israel’s restoration is based on Israel’s belief in Jesus. As Allison states, “For Jesus affirms that, if she will, Jerusalem can, in the end, bless in the name of the Lord the one who will come, and her doing so, that is, her repentance, will lead to deliverance.”²⁸

Matthew 23:39, predicts a future salvation and deliverance of Israel. This coincides with another truth that Jesus’ return is linked with Israel’s belief in Him. The abandonment of Jerusalem by Jesus will come to an end “when Jerusalem genuinely understands Ps. 118:26, the text shouted by the crowd at the triumphal entry.”²⁹ Just as sinful rebellion against God’s Messiah will result in terrible judgment, so too, embracement of the Messiah will lead to blessings and reversal of judgment. Contingency in Matt 23:39 does exist. As Charles H. Talbert concludes in regard to this verse, “When his [Jesus’] people bless him, the messiah will come (cf. Acts 3:19–21). The date of redemption for the Matthean Jesus, then, is *contingent* on Israel’s acceptance of him.”³⁰

Israel’s Belief and the Coming of the Kingdom (Acts 3:12–26)

Acts 3:12–26 discusses the relationship of Israel to the return of Christ and the kingdom after Jesus’ ascension and the sending of the Holy Spirit. This section also lays out what McClain has rightly called “the official reoffer of the Messiah and His Kingdom.”³¹

The healing of a lame beggar at the temple by Peter led to the apostle addressing the “Men of Israel” (Acts 3:12). Because of the Feast of Pentecost, many Jews were present in Jerusalem including the same Jewish leadership that put Jesus to death (see Acts 4:1, 6). The setting of Jerusalem, the temple, the Jewish people, and the Jewish leadership make this address by Peter an event with national implications.

Peter states that the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob made Jesus His Servant, and this Jesus has fulfilled the OT prophecies concerning His suffering (see 3:13, 18). But Peter tells the Jewish audience that they “disowned the Holy and Righteous One” and “put to death the Prince of life” (3:13–15). It is this same Jesus who gave “perfect health” to the lame beggar (3:16).

What follows next is important. Peter does not proclaim irreversible judgment for Israel’s rejection of her Messiah. Instead, he softens his accusation by saying that the people and leaders of Israel “acted in ignorance” (3:17). What he offers now is a second chance or offer to believe in the Messiah and receive the kingdom:

“Therefore repent and return, so that your sins may be wiped away, in order that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord; and that He may send Jesus, the Christ appointed for you, whom heaven must receive until the period of restoration of all things about which God spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from ancient time” (Acts 3:19–21).

This section speaks of cause and effect situations. Peter calls on the Jews to “repent and return.” His call is similar to the calls from the OT prophets for rebellious Israel to repent. And it is a summons to salvation. The leaders are encouraged to turn from their sins and believe in Jesus the Messiah, whom they have rejected so far.³² If they do, something positive will happen. The words “so that” (*prōs ta*) indicate purpose. Repentance will lead to sins being “wiped away.” Thus, Israel’s acceptance of Jesus the Messiah will lead to the removal of sins. More than just individual sins and repentance are in view here. The national sin of rejecting the Messiah must be reversed by national repentance.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Turner, *Matthew*, 561.

³⁰ Charles H. Talbert, *Matthew*, in *Commentaries on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), 260. Emphasis is mine.

³¹ Alva J. McClain, *The Greatness of the Kingdom: An Inductive Study of the Kingdom of God* (Winona Lake, IN: BMH Books, 1959), 403.

³² The sins to be wiped away probably include both individual sins and the corporate sin of rejecting the Messiah.

But Peter does not stop there. Forgiveness is not the only result of repentance. Peter then mentions “in order that” (*hopōs an*) which indicates another purpose is in mind. Repentance leads to forgiveness but then forgiveness of sins leads to something called “the times of refreshing” which results from the Lord’s presence (3:19).

This phrase, “times of refreshing,” which only occurs here in the NT, involves the ideas of rest and refreshment. In this context it refers to an eschatological refreshment from God. There is some debate concerning what this “times of refreshing” is and when it occurs. Some see “times of refreshing” as forgiveness of sins and the experience of the Holy Spirit in this age. Others see the “times of refreshing” as the kingdom itself that comes when Jesus returns. The latter option is more likely. The “times of refreshing” refers to the kingdom and is connected with the return of Jesus and the “restoration of all things” (v. 21). Toussaint argues that the grammar supports this link between “times of refreshing” and the return of Jesus:

The two clauses that follow *hopōs* go together. In other words, “that the times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord” must be taken with the words “and that He may send Jesus.” As Haenchen puts it, “But the two promises are complementary statements about one and the same event.” Nothing grammatically separates the promises: in fact, they are joined together by the connective *kai*.³³

So then, this refreshing period is future and refers to coming kingdom conditions. James Montgomery Boice rightly links this with national blessings for Israel in connection with the return of Jesus. He says, “[‘times of refreshing’] probably concerns a future day of blessing when the Jewish people will turn to Christ in large numbers and a final age of national blessing will come.”³⁴ Experiencing the “times of refreshing” means experiencing the blessings of Messiah’s kingdom when He comes again. If “times of refreshing” refers to Messiah’s kingdom on earth, then Peter is saying that if Israel repents their sins will be forgiven and then the kingdom will come.

So is this a statement of contingency? Are kingdom conditions contingent on Israel’s response to Jesus? It appears so from this text. The near context of 3:19 has already revealed a clear statement of contingency. If Israel would repent then their sins would be forgiven. So why couldn’t contingency in regard to the next purpose statement regarding the coming of the kingdom be present as well? As Toussaint states, “Peter had just said that removal of their sins was contingent on their repentance (v. 19). If contingency exists here, then it is certainly also present in verses 20–21.”³⁵

In addition to “times of refreshing,” Israel’s repentance will also mean that “He [God] may send Jesus, the Christ appointed for you.” This is a specific reference to the second coming of Jesus. The context and grammar make it difficult to avoid the conclusion that the return of Jesus is linked with Israel’s belief and repentance. The term for “may send” (*aposteilei*) is an aorist active subjunctive emphasizing possibility and a contingent element to this promise. If Israel believes, then God will send Jesus the Messiah. As John Phillips puts it:

³³ Stanley D. Toussaint, “The Contingency of the Coming of the Kingdom,” in *Integrity of Heart, Skillfulness of Hands: Biblical and Leadership Studies in Honor of Donald K. Campbell*, eds. Charles H. Dyer and Roy B. Zuck (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 229–30.

³⁴ James Montgomery Boice, *Acts: An Expositional Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997), 69. Boice also says there may be a sense in which the phrase may include blessings for God’s people now. Walker also agrees that “times of refreshing” is a reference to a future kingdom: “The expression probably looks on ultimately to the time when Christ shall come again and when those Messianic promises which still remain unfulfilled shall be perfectly consummated. . . . That will be the golden age of blessing for the Jewish nation, and, through them, a period of spiritual quickening to the world at large (Romans xi. 11–36).” Thomas Walker, *Acts of the Apostles*. Kregel Expository Commentary Series (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1965), 106–07.

³⁵ Stanley D. Toussaint and Jay A. Quine, “No, Not Yet: The Contingency of God’s Promised Kingdom,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 164 (April–June, 2007): 144.

If the Jews had repented then and there, the initial fulfillment of such prophecies, as were evidenced at Pentecost, would have blossomed into a complete fulfillment, and the return of Christ could have taken place within a generation.³⁶

That Peter states “the Christ appointed for you,” is also significant. This highlights the continuing close relationship between Israel and the Messiah. Even the death of the Messiah at the hands of the Jewish leadership does not change this fact. Jesus is Savior and Messiah of all the world, but there is still a specific sense in which He is the Messiah of Israel. The crucifixion does not change this. Jesus is appointed for Israel because of the covenants and the promises (Rom 9:4). This also shows the close connection between Israel’s response to her Messiah and the Messiah’s coming.³⁷

Peter then offers an extra truth about Jesus the Messiah. Jesus is the One “whom heaven must receive until the period of restoration of all things” (3:21a). Jesus’ session in heaven is not a last second addition to God’s plans. It is something that “must” occur. The fact that heaven must receive the Messiah until the kingdom is established was predicted in the OT. David spoke of this in Ps 110:1–2 when he related that Yahweh told David’s Lord, the Messiah, that He will sit at His right hand until the time comes for David’s Lord to rule over His enemies. A session for the Messiah at the right hand of God must precede Messiah’s kingdom reign from Jerusalem (see Ps 110:1–2). That Peter has Psalm 110 in mind is likely since Paul quoted this psalm in His first address to the Jewish people in Acts 2:30–36.

In addition to “times of refreshing” and the sending of the Messiah, Peter then introduces “the restoration of all things,” of which the OT prophets spoke. The word for “restoration” is *apokatastasis*, a term used in verb form in Acts 1:6 when the disciples asked Jesus about when the kingdom would be restored to Israel.³⁸ To restore something is to take a marred entity and renew it, to fix what has been broken. The close connection of “restore” in Acts 1:6 and 3:21 is no coincidence. It reveals that the promised coming restoration of Acts 3:21 includes the restoration of Israel. As Beverly Roberts Gaventa observes, “Given that the apostles have already inquired about the ‘restoration’ of the kingdom . . . the ‘restoration of all’ surely includes restoring the kingdom of Israel.”³⁹ This idea is reinforced by OT prophets who often predicted a restoration of Israel. Jeremiah 16:15 states, “For I will restore them to their own land which I gave to their fathers.”⁴⁰ Keener points out that when the connection with Acts 1:6 and the OT prophets is considered, the restoration of Acts 3:21 includes a restored Israel:

In view of the cognate usage in Acts 1:6 and the texts’ claim that the object of restoration is what all the prophets spoke about, the restoration of Israel is the likeliest interpretation. Israel’s restoration appears repeatedly in the biblical prophets (Amos 9:14; Ezek 39:25; Acts 1:6), a significant point here given that the restoration of what “the prophets predicted” (Acts 3:21).⁴¹

So the restoration to come includes Israel. Yet there is no reason to limit the restoration of all things to just national Israel. Since the prophets portrayed Israel as a microcosm for what God was doing with all nations and the creation (see Isa 27:6), the restoration of Israel will lead to global blessings on a wide scale and includes cosmic renewal and harmony in the animal kingdom (Isa 11:6–9). Again, this is a case where both a *particular* and a *universal* work together in harmony. The restoration of all things is

³⁶ John Phillips, *Exploring Acts: An Expository Commentary*. The John Phillips Commentary Series. (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1986), 75.

³⁷ In regard to the “appointed for you,” Peter Goeman observes, “The dative ‘you’ . . . is likely a dative of possession and brings out the fact that this was the Jewish Messiah, He belonged to them. Thus, Peter’s argument appears to focus on the necessity of Jewish repentance so that their Messiah would be sent back.” Peter Goeman, “Implications of the Kingdom in Acts 3:19–21,” *MSJ* 26:1 (Spring 2015): pages to be determined.

³⁸ I. Howard Marshall also points out that the reference to “times” in 3:19 may have links with Jesus’ statement that the disciples were not to know times or epochs in regard to Israel’s restoration: “There may be a link with the ‘times’ in 1:7 associated with the restoration of the rule of God for Israel.” I. Howard Marshall, *Acts*. Tyndale New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980. Reprint 1989), 93.

³⁹ Beverly Roberts Gaventa, *Acts* in Abingdon New Testament Commentaries, (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2003), 88.

⁴⁰ See also Jer 23:8; 24:6; Hos 11:11.

⁴¹ Craig S. Keener, *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013), 2:1112.

focused on the restoration of Israel but the implications of this restoration are global and holistic. Thus, the “restoration of all things” involves kingdom blessings for Israel but also expands to the whole earth and all nations.

To summarize, a significant cause and effect scenario arises in Acts 3:19–21. If the people and leaders of Israel believe in Jesus they will be saved and their national sin of rejecting the Messiah will be forgiven. This salvation will lead to the arrival of the kingdom (“times of refreshing”), the return of the Messiah, and the restoration of all creation. The “times of refreshing” and “restoration of all things” is the kingdom, while the return of Jesus focuses on the return of the King. These are inseparably connected. Thus, the scenario below (→ = “leads to”):

Israel repentance → Israel’s forgiveness → Return of Christ → Kingdom of God

This cause and effect scenario has not gone unnoticed by scholars. F.F. Bruce rightly pointed out that the “call” to Israel in Acts 3:19–21 had the opportunity to change the course of world history. If only Israel had believed at that time the kingdom would have come “much more swiftly”:

The exact meaning of these words of Peter has been debated from various points of view. This at least may be said with assurance: the whole house of Israel, now as on the day of Pentecost, received a call to reverse the verdict of Passover Eve and to accord Jesus united acknowledgement as Messiah. Had Israel as a whole done this during these Pentecostal days, how different the course of world history and world evangelization would have been! How much more swiftly (we may imagine) would the consummation of Christ’s kingdom have come!”⁴²

Bruce even uses the word “offer” in regard to what Peter is presenting to Israel at this time. The refusal of Israel to heed the offer delays the coming of Jesus:

Israel as a whole declined the renewed offer of grace and refused to recognize Jesus as Messiah. . . . The grand consummation and the *parousia* of Jesus lie still in the future: “we see not yet all things subjected to him” (Heb. 2:8).”⁴³

Others have noted a contingency element regarding the coming of the kingdom and the second coming of Jesus in Acts 3. I Howard Marshall sees the future kingdom of God as “dependent” on the belief of the Jews: “That is to say, the coming of the ‘messianic age’ or the future kingdom of God, for which the Jews longed, was dependent upon their acceptance of Jesus as the Messiah.”⁴⁴ Ben Witherington also states, “. . . and Christ’s second coming is seen as in some sense dependent on Israel’s repentance (cf. Rom. 11:12, 15, 26).”⁴⁵ David Peterson notes, “Peter’s point in vv. 19–20 is that the previously rejected Messiah will return only if Israel repents.”⁴⁶ Richard L. Longenecker sums up the message of Acts 3:19–21 well when he states, “Peter goes on to say that if his hearers repent, their repentance will have a part in ushering in the great events of the end time.”⁴⁷

⁴² F. F. Bruce, *Commentary on the Book of the Acts*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971), 91–92.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 92. Underline emphasis is mine.

⁴⁴ I. Howard Marshall, *Acts* in Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 94.

⁴⁵ Ben Witherington III, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 187.

⁴⁶ David G. Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 181. Munck states, “Both Jews and Christians knew that there would be human participation in the fulfillment of salvation. The Jews maintained that Israel must first be converted, otherwise the Messianic age could not occur.” Johannes Munck, *The Acts of the Apostles: The Anchor Bible*, (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company), 1967), 29.

⁴⁷ Richard N. Longenecker, “The Acts of the Apostles,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, vol. 9., ed. Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981), 297.

Also important is the repeated emphasis that the restoration of the kingdom to Israel is based on the OT: “. . . until the period of restoration of all things about which God spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from ancient time” (3:21). And, as we argued earlier, the prophets of the OT on several occasions promised kingdom conditions based on Israel’s repentance:

- Leviticus 26:40–45 predicted that a dispersed Israel could be brought back into the blessings of the Abrahamic covenant “if” repentance occurred.
- Deuteronomy 30:1–10 declared that a changed heart on behalf of Israel would lead to regathering from dispersion and spiritual and physical blessings.
- Jeremiah 18:7–10 revealed that that promises of blessings or calamity can be affected by a nation’s response to God.
- In 2 Chronicles 7:14 God stated, “and My people who are called by My name humble themselves and pray and seek My face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, will forgive their sin and will heal their land.”

Note also that the wording of Acts 3:21 closely parallels the words of the Spirit-inspired Zacharias in Luke 1:70:

“As He spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from of old” (Luke 1:70).

“. . . about which God spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from ancient time” (Acts 3:21).

And like Acts 3:21, the content Luke 1:70 involves the restoration of national Israel:

As He spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from of old—
Salvation FROM OUR ENEMIES,
And FROM THE HAND OF ALL WHO HATE US;
To show mercy toward our fathers,
And to remember His holy covenant,
The oath which He swore to Abraham our father,
To grant us that we, being rescued from the hand of our enemies,
Might serve Him without fear.

Peter then says these truths were taught by the prophets since Samuel (Acts 3:24). Then with Acts 3:25 Peter tells the leaders of Israel, “It is you who are the sons of the prophets and of the covenant which God made with your fathers, saying to Abraham, ‘AND IN YOUR SEED ALL THE FAMILIES OF THE EARTH SHALL BE BLESSED.’” These words refute any idea that the Jewish nation is no longer significant in God’s kingdom plans. Even after killing the Messiah and after Jesus’ ascension and pouring out of the Holy Spirit, Israel is still important to God. Peter affirms Israel’s continuing relationship to the Abrahamic covenant. And he singles out the promise of Gen 12:3 and 22:18 concerning Israel’s bringing universal blessings. This occurs through Israel’s Messiah even if the people refused to believe.

In sum, Acts 3:19–26 is a strategic passage for the kingdom program. McClain points out that with this section, “we have something better than a term,” we actually have “a *definition* of the Kingdom.”⁴⁸ And this definition has three components. First, in regard to “content,” the kingdom brings “the restoration of all things.” Second, as for “timing,” the kingdom comes when Jesus sends the Christ

⁴⁸ McClain, *The Greatness of the Kingdom*, 406. Emphasis is in the original.

appointed for Israel after His session at the right hand of the Father. And third, the condition for the kingdom's coming is "contingent upon the repentance and conversion of Israel."⁴⁹

Romans 11:11–15

Another passage that could have implications for Israel's repentance and the kingdom of God is Rom 11:11–15:

I say then, they [Israel] did not stumble so as to fall, did they? May it never be! But by their transgression salvation has come to the Gentiles, to make them jealous. Now if their transgression is riches for the world and their failure is riches for the Gentiles, how much more will their fulfillment be! But I am speaking to you who are Gentiles. Inasmuch then as I am an apostle of Gentiles, I magnify my ministry, if somehow I might move to jealousy my fellow countrymen and save some of them. For if their rejection is the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead?

Here Israel's unbelief and then later belief are related to world blessings. Israel's current "transgression" and "failure" has brought "riches" for "the world" and "Gentiles" (v. 12). So Israel's unbelief has not halted God's plans, for God is using Israel's unbelief to bless the world. But more is to come with Israel's belief. As Schreiner states concerning verse 12, "If the trespass of Israel has led to worldwide blessing, then their belief will bring even greater blessing to the world."⁵⁰

Yet Paul offers more. Verse 15 reveals that Israel's "acceptance" will mean even greater blessings—"life from the dead." Life from the dead has been understood in different ways. Some say it refers to the salvation of Israel or physical resurrection. While these will occur, the best answer is that life from the dead is kingdom blessings, and probably includes the glorification of the creation discussed earlier in Rom 8:18–25. Salvific blessings in this age will be followed by a holistic restoration of creation, what Acts 3:21 called the "restoration of all things." The point is that blessings now lead to much greater blessings to come. If God can use Israel's current unbelief to bring world blessings, what greater blessings will follow for the world when Israel believes (see Rom 11:26)? What happens now is good, but it gets much better.

Another issue is Paul's references to "their rejection" and "their acceptance" in verse 15. Do they refer to God's rejection and then God's acceptance of Israel? Or do they refer to Israel's rejection of Christ and the gospel and then Israel's acceptance of Christ and the gospel? Or to put another way, does God first reject and then accept Israel, or does Israel first reject the gospel and then believe later? The former view argues for an objective genitive. The latter argues for a subjective genitive—Israel's rejection of God and the Gospel by not believing in Jesus.

There certainly is room for debate on this issue with fine scholars who argue for the objective genitive and thus God's rejection of Israel. Yet Jim Sibley has put together a fine case for the subjective genitive understanding.⁵¹ Perhaps the strongest argument for the "God's rejection of Israel" view is that Romans 9–11 is a section emphasizing God's sovereignty. Yet Romans 9–11 also indicts Israel for their unbelief. Israel stumbled over Christ choosing to try to work their way unto salvation instead of trusting in Christ through faith (see Rom 9:30–10:4). Certainly, the "transgression" of v. 11 and v. 12 is Israel's volitional choice of unbelief. Since verses 12 and 15 parallel each other, the "transgression" is probably parallel to "rejection" in verse 15. Just as Israel committed "transgression" they probably are the ones committing the "rejection."

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans*, in Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 596.

⁵¹ Jim R. Sibley, "Has the Church Put Israel on the Shelf? The Evidence from Romans 11:15," in *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 58.3 (September 2015): 571–81.

If Israel's rejection of the gospel is in view this is evidence that Israel's repentance and belief are linked with kingdom blessings, since verse 15 states, "what will their acceptance be but life from the dead?" So Israel's belief is tied to kingdom blessings.

Israel's Repentance and the Second Coming of Jesus

Several passages connect Israel's repentance with the Messiah's second coming and kingdom, supporting the claim that Israel's repentance is connected with the kingdom of God. Zechariah 12–14 speaks of a time when Jerusalem is under siege and the Lord returns and defends Israel. The result is that "The LORD will be king over all the earth; in that day the LORD will be the only one, and His name the only one" (Zech 14:9). Zechariah 12:10–14 links Israel's salvation with a deep and heart-felt national repentance from the various families of Israel:

"I will pour out on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the Spirit of grace and of supplication, so that they will look on Me whom they have pierced; and they will mourn for Him, as one mourns for an only son, and they will weep bitterly over Him like the bitter weeping over a firstborn. In that day there will be great mourning in Jerusalem, like the mourning of Hadadrimmon in the plain of Megiddo. The land will mourn, every family by itself; the family of the house of David by itself and their wives by themselves; the family of the house of Nathan by itself and their wives by themselves; the family of the house of Levi by itself and their wives by themselves; the family of the Shimeites by itself and their wives by themselves; all the families that remain, every family by itself and their wives by themselves.

With His Olivet Discourse in Matthew 24 Jesus linked His second coming with Israel's repentance:

"But immediately after the tribulation of those days THE SUN WILL BE DARKENED, AND THE MOON WILL NOT GIVE ITS LIGHT, AND THE STARS WILL FALL from the sky, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. And then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the SON OF MAN COMING ON THE CLOUDS OF THE SKY with power and great glory. And He will send forth His angels with A GREAT TRUMPET and THEY WILL GATHER TOGETHER His elect from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other (Matt 24:29–31).

Jesus' statement that "all the tribes of the earth will mourn" is best translated "all the tribes of the land will mourn" and has specific reference to the tribes of Israel that repent in connection with the Messiah's return and kingdom. The Greek term *ges* (**gh/j**) can be translated as "earth" or "land." Since the context of Matthew 24 focuses heavily on the land of Israel and Jesus quotes OT passages involving the gathering of Israel from foreign lands for kingdom blessings, the better understanding is that Jesus is referring specifically to the tribes of Israel and the land of Israel, and not universally to all people groups. This understanding is bolstered by the fact that Jesus quotes a cluster of OT prophetic texts that foretell a rescue of Israel after a time of scattering and persecution. His reference to "all the tribe of the land will mourn" refers to Zech 12:10 which speaks of Israel's salvation as the people look unto the Messiah.

His reference to "the SON OF MAN COMING ON THE CLOUDS OF THE SKY" harkens to Dan 7:13 a passage that speaks of the deliverance of Israel and a kingdom reign of the saints after withering persecution (Dan 7:24–27). Jesus' mention of "A GREAT TRUMPET and THEY WILL GATHER TOGETHER His elect" is a quotation of Isa 27:13 and the gathering of Israel from around the world for kingdom blessings. Deuteronomy 30:4–5a, also seems to be a backdrop for Jesus's words: "If your outcasts are at the ends of the earth, from there the LORD your God will gather you, and from there He will bring you back. The LORD your God will bring you into the land which your fathers possessed . . ." In sum, Matt 24:29–31 links Israel's repentance with the return of Jesus and His kingdom (see Matt 25:31).

We have already surveyed Rom 11:11–15 and Paul’s telling of future kingdom blessings for the world when Israel believes. When one connects this section with Rom 11:26–27, we see that the repentance and salvation of all Israel and kingdom blessings are linked with the return of Jesus:

and so all Israel will be saved; just as it is written,
“THE DELIVERER WILL COME FROM ZION,
HE WILL REMOVE UNGODLINESS FROM JACOB.”
“THIS IS MY COVENANT WITH THEM,
WHEN I TAKE AWAY THEIR SINS.”

Answers to Objections

Some object to the idea that the arrival of the kingdom of God is contingent on national Israel’s belief in God and Jesus the Messiah. Does this not challenge the sovereignty of God? Does this not make God’s plans wholly dependent on the will of man? The answer is no.

To start, most Christians acknowledge contingency of salvation and eternal life with a person’s response to the gospel. Is it not true, on an individual level, that a person’s salvation and eternal destiny is linked with conversion (repentance/faith)?⁵² A person must believe in Jesus to be saved. We offer the gospel to people telling them to believe in Jesus for eternal life. If a person believes they will be saved, if not they will be lost. So contingency is part of the process that God intended. What is true at an individual level (belief linked with salvation) can also be true at the national level for Israel.

One objection to the view presented here is that God already knew Israel would not believe, so how could a genuine offer of kingdom blessings be given to a people whom God knew would not believe? Yet, again, on the individual level, is there not a genuine offer of salvation on God’s part when the gospel is preached to a person that God knows will not believe? Those who are Reformed in their theology usually affirm a genuine offer of salvation to the non-elect. God can and does genuinely offer blessings to those He knows will not believe. So if God can genuinely offer salvation to a lost person that God knows will not believe, then why can He not also make a genuine offer of kingdom blessings to Israel, even though He knows the nation would not believe at that time? Again, what is true at an individual level can be true at a national level.

Another common objection is that such a scenario implies that the cross of Christ would be unnecessary if Israel believed in Jesus at His first coming. Allegedly, if Israel had believed in Jesus and the earthly kingdom He was presenting, then the cross of Jesus would not have occurred. Our response to this is twofold. First, whatever view of the kingdom one holds, Jesus was presenting it before the cross. This is true whether one believes Jesus was presenting a spiritual kingdom in the heart or an earthly kingdom. For the sake of argument, what if Jesus’ hearers believed in an alleged spiritual kingdom, wouldn’t the cross have been unnecessary?

Also, we strongly affirm that God’s kingdom purposes could only be accomplished through the death of Jesus. No cross, no kingdom! The cross of Christ had to occur. Both human and cosmic reconciliation only happen through the atoning work of the Suffering Servant (see Isaiah 52–53). Jesus’ atonement is the basis for the kingdom. Thus, the suffering of the Messiah is not only predicted in the OT, it is necessary for the kingdom. Colossians 1:20 says that the “reconciliation of all things” occurs “through the blood of His cross.” Those positing a contingent offer of the kingdom to Israel do not believe the necessity of the cross would have been removed. Instead, this appears to be an unnecessary inference from those opposed to the contingent offer view.

⁵² This is consistent with the doctrine of regeneration in which God causes someone who is spiritually dead to become spiritually alive. Even those who believe that regeneration precedes faith believe that lost people must believe the gospel.

So what would have happened if Israel had believed at Jesus' first coming? On one level, this is an issue that does not need to be answered, since it is a hypothetical question. It is up there with the question, "What if Adam did not sin?" Or what if a person who died an unbeliever would have believed? Genuine salvation and blessing can be offered to those who refuse to believe. All we need to know is that Israel was offered real kingdom blessings, yet with hindsight, we know that in God's sovereign plan this was not going to occur at this time.

For those who identify with covenant theology, they face the same issue. Covenant theologians often affirm a covenant of redemption in which the members of the Trinity covenanted together in eternity past to save elect persons. Jesus' role in this pre-time covenant of redemption is to die on the cross to pay the sin penalty for the elect. Yet covenant theologians also often affirm a covenant of works in which God promised Adam salvation for obedience yet death for disobedience (see Gen 2:15-17). Covenant theologians tell us that God's offer of salvation and perfection to Adam was real. It was genuine. If Adam obeyed there would be no sin and he would obtain eternal life. But what if Adam obeyed and had not sinned? Does this mean the covenant of redemption including Jesus' cross would be void?

Conclusion

Both the OT and NT teach that the arrival of the kingdom of God is related to national Israel's repentance. This position is consistent with both God's sovereignty and his omniscience. Christians should note this theological truth and incorporate it into a proper understanding of the Bible's storyline.

Passages that Affirm Contingency in regard to the Kingdom

Lev 26:40-45: Israel's dispersion can be reversed and reinstatement to the Abrahamic Covenant can occur upon condition of national repentance.

Jer 3:12-18: Israel's repentance can lead to faithful shepherds, prosperity in the land, God's presence, nations coming to Jerusalem, and unification for the tribes of Israel.

Jer 18:1-10: The principle is established that God will change His plans for good or evil against a nation if it change its ways.

1 Sam 13:13-14: If Saul obeyed, God would establish his kingdom forever, but disobedience removed this possibility.

2 Chron 7:14: God promises that if Israel will seek God, He will forgive their sin and heal their land.

Matt 3:2; 4:17 10:5-7: The kingdom is presented as imminent to the people of Israel upon the condition of repentance.

Matt 11:14: If Israel will accept him, John the Baptist can fulfill the prophecy of Elijah's coming to restore the hearts of the fathers (Mal 4:5-6)

Luke 19:41-44: Israel could have "peace" on "this day" but missed its "time of visitation" resulting in coming national catastrophe.

Matt 23:39/Luke 13:35: Israel will not experience the presence of Jesus until the nation cries out to Him.

Acts 3:19-21: Israel's repentance and belief leads to kingdom conditions, the return of Jesus, and the restoration of all things.

Rom 11:11-15: Israel's acceptance of Christ leads to even greater blessings (the kingdom).