

Lesson 9—Act III

Over the past couple times that we have met, we worked our way through Act II of God's plan to glorify himself by redeeming his fallen creation. After seeing God provide salvation through the nation of Israel by sending his Messiah, Jesus, to suffer, die for sins, and then be raised from the dead three days later, we saw God begin his work of proclaiming that salvation to the whole world through this new channel of redemption called the Church. The Church was something totally new in history as God worked, by the Holy Spirit, through those faithful to Him to bring about one new man, the Christian, out of the two, Jews and Gentiles, by uniting them through faith in Jesus Christ. The emergence of the Church, as we saw, indicated a rather dramatic shift in God's redemptive operations here on earth. As we heard Jesus explain in his parable of the vineyard in Matthew 21 and as we saw Paul illustrate through his analogy of an olive tree in Romans 11, God maintained the same work of redemption that he began when he made his promise to Abraham—to bless the whole world through the nation brought from him—but now he has shifted his mode of operation from Israel to the Church; the tree (the kingdom of God) continues to grow and flourish while the branch through which the tree flourishes has changed (from Israel to the Church).

Act II, with the Church as God's primary mode of redemption on this earth, is the Act of God within which we currently find ourselves. Consequently, as we begin to look now into Act III, God's final act of redemption on earth, we will be examining what the Scriptures have to say regarding future events and the end of time. With this in mind, please note that what we are going to discuss tonight ~~and next week~~, we approach with much more caution as we attempt to understand what God is going to do in his final Act of redemption on earth. Of all three Acts of God, Act III is easily the most difficult to understand and interpret because we are examining

what God has to say about things that have yet to happen; we don't have history and hindsight to help us here, hence the extra caution. Due to the difficult and mysterious nature of this portion of the Scriptures, I will confidently present to you what I believe the Bible is saying, but I am aware that there are many different and valid interpretations of these portions of Scripture. Therefore, as always, I highly encourage you all to explore what the Bible says about this final, future, act of God for yourself before coming to a final conclusion.

Now, after that little disclaimer, let's dive in. Just like the coming of Jesus the Messiah and the work he did on the Cross was the defining event that ended Act I, so there is a defining event that will end Act II and usher us into Act III: **Matthew 24:3, 6, 14 reads** ³ "As he sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately, saying, 'Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age...' ⁶ "And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not alarmed, for this must take place, but the end is not yet..." ¹⁴ "And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come." So, we see here that Jesus' second coming will mark the end of 'the age,' which we are calling Act II, and this coming will be preceded by the proclamation of the gospel of the kingdom of God throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations.

This new act, Act III, will be marked with a new channel of redemption, just as Act I was marked with Israel as God's channel of redemption and as Act II ^{is} ~~was~~ marked with the Church as the new channel of redemption. In Act III, we see God begin to work primarily through the nation of Israel again. **Romans 11:25 reads**, ²⁵ "Lest you be wise in your own sight, I do not want you to be unaware of this mystery, brothers: a partial hardening has come upon Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in." Here, Paul is telling us that the hardening—disbelief in

Jesus—that is currently on Israel is only temporary. It is going to last only until the fullness of the Gentiles has come into the fold of the people of God, which will be, as Jesus put it in **Matthew 24:14**, “when the gospel of this kingdom has been proclaimed to the whole world as a testimony to all nations.” When the gospel of the kingdom of God has been proclaimed throughout the whole world, the fullness of the Gentiles will have been brought in, Act II will be over, and Act III will begin, with the nation of Israel once again serving as God’s channel of redemption on earth.

The prophets Hosea and Ezekiel seem to be saying the same thing to us, even though they prophesied about it thousands of years ago, and even hundreds of years before Jesus and Paul. **Hosea 3:1-5** reads, “And the Lord said to me, “Go again, love a woman who is loved by another man and is an adulteress, even as the Lord loves the children of Israel, though they turn to other gods and love cakes of raisins.”² So I bought her for fifteen shekels of silver and a homer and a lethech of barley.³ And I said to her, “You must dwell as mine for many days. You shall not play the whore, or belong to another man; so will I also be to you.”⁴ For the children of Israel shall dwell many days without king or prince, without sacrifice or pillar, without ephod or household gods.⁵ Afterward the children of Israel shall return and seek the Lord their God, and David their king, and they shall come in fear to the Lord and to his goodness in the latter days.” We see here that Israel, despite being loved unconditionally by God, will abandon him for a time, which is during Act II. Then, there will be a time when they return to the Lord their God, and David their king. Now, David is dead, and so it clearly means that they will return to the King of Israel who sits on the throne as a descendant of David’s; the one who clearly fits this description is Jesus, God’s Messiah, who is the King of Israel as the everlasting descendant from David. So, Hosea

has told us that after a time of departing from God, Israel will return to the Lord their God and honor Jesus as their King.

Then, in **Ezekiel 37:11-14**, we read, “¹¹ Then he said to me, “Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel. Behold, they say, ‘Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are indeed cut off.’ ¹² Therefore prophesy, and say to them, Thus says the Lord God: Behold, I will open your graves and raise you from your graves, O my people. And I will bring you into the land of Israel. ¹³ And you shall know that I am the Lord, when I open your graves, and raise you from your graves, O my people. ¹⁴ And I will put my Spirit within you, and you shall live, and I will place you in your own land. Then you shall know that I am the Lord; I have spoken, and I will do it, declares the Lord.” Again, we hear of a time when Israel finds themselves ‘cut off’ from God, which again refers to this time in Act II and is eerily similar to the language Paul used in Romans 11 to describe Israel as the natural branch that was ‘cut off’ of the cultivated olive tree. Then, God declares that there will be a later time when he restores Israel, puts his Spirit within them, and brings them back to their own land.

We start to see what this will look like when we jump to **Isaiah 2:2-4**:

“It shall come to pass in the latter days
 that the mountain of the house of the Lord
 shall be established as the highest of the mountains,
 and shall be lifted up above the hills;
 and all the nations shall flow to it,
³ and many peoples shall come, and say:
 “Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord,
 to the house of the God of Jacob,
 that he may teach us his ways
 and that we may walk in his paths.”
 For out of Zion shall go forth the law,

and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.

⁴He shall judge between the nations,

and shall decide disputes for many peoples;

and they shall beat their swords into plowshares,

and their spears into pruning hooks;

nation shall not lift up sword against nation,

neither shall they learn war anymore.”

Then, in **Isaiah 27:6**, we read,

“In days to come Jacob shall take root,

Israel shall blossom and put forth shoots

and fill the whole world with fruit.”

Isaiah paints a picture for us of that time and that picture shows us a world that is ruled by King Jesus, reigning from Israel, and that is full of righteousness and the glory of God. So, in Act III, we see that God will finally come full circle in his plan for redemption, using the nation of Israel—the nation from Abraham through which Jesus Christ, a descendant of David and the Son of God, came, suffered for sins, died, and rose again three days later for the salvation of mankind from our sins—to rule the earth in righteousness, filling it with his glory and fulfilling his end goal (**Numbers 14:21**: ²¹But truly, as I live, and as all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the Lord). In Act I, God provided salvation for the whole world; in Act II, God is proclaiming that salvation to the whole world; in Act III, God is perfecting his salvation, or making it complete.

Now, in all of this, you might have noticed that I didn't really mention how all of this happened, and that was very much on purpose. First, I wanted us to see what happens in Act III, and then once we got a grasp on that, then we would look at how it all happens—or at least, how I believe it will happen based on the Scriptures. You will remember that we spent significant time discussing how God shifted from using Israel to using the Church as Act I ended and Act II

began. Now, as we look at Act III, God will shift from using the Church to once again using Israel. So, just like how we were asking during Act II—what happened to Israel—now in Act III we will be asking—what happens to the Church? God seems to only work through one channel of redemption at a time: in Act I it was Israel and in Act II it is the Church. Consequently, Israel was set aside while God works with the Church to proclaim the redemption he provided through Jesus Christ, and so something significant must happen to the Church as God shifts back to working through Israel to perfect this redemption.

I believe this ‘something significant’ that happens to the Church will be the rapture. **1 Thessalonians 4:17** says, “¹⁷ Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord.” Here, Paul is telling us that when Jesus comes again, marking the end of Act II ^{after} when the gospel of the kingdom of God has been proclaimed to the whole world, the remaining members of the Church will be caught up together with those who have already passed on to meet the Lord Jesus in the air, and so taking the Church out of the picture and making room once again for God to work through Israel.

However, before the Church is raptured to be with Jesus as he comes back the second time, there is another series of events that I believe will first take place to help revitalize Israel to prepare the nation for its return to the Lord prophesied in **Hosea 3:4-5**—⁴“For the children of Israel shall dwell many days without king or prince, without sacrifice or pillar, without ephod or household gods. ⁵ Afterward the children of Israel shall return and seek the Lord their God, and David their king, and they shall come in fear to the Lord and to his goodness in the latter days,” and **Ezekiel 37:11-14**—¹¹“Then he said to me, “Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel. Behold, they say, ‘Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are indeed cut

off.’¹² Therefore prophesy, and say to them, Thus says the Lord God: Behold, I will open your graves and raise you from your graves, O my people. And I will bring you into the land of Israel.¹³ And you shall know that I am the Lord, when I open your graves, and raise you from your graves, O my people.¹⁴ And I will put my Spirit within you, and you shall live, and I will place you in your own land. Then you shall know that I am the Lord; I have spoken, and I will do it, declares the Lord.”

This series of events is most commonly referred to as the ‘Great Tribulation’ and is spoken of by Jesus primarily in **Matthew 24: verses 21-22** read, “²¹ For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been from the beginning of the world until now, no, and never will be.²² And if those days had not been cut short, no human being would be saved. But for the sake of the elect those days will be cut short.” The prophet Jeremiah, in **Jeremiah 30:7**, says this about this ‘Great Tribulation’:

“⁷ Alas! That day is so great
there is none like it;
it is a time of distress for Jacob;
yet he shall be saved out of it.”

The rest of Jeremiah 30 goes on to explain how God will indeed save Israel out of that time of ‘Great Tribulation’ and restore them to glory and honor as they turn back to him to serve him only, indicating that this ‘Great Tribulation’ is intended by God to revitalize his people; I believe this time of tribulation will soften their hearts and makes them more receptive to the gospel that they have so long rejected, and that they will find themselves submitting to God’s Messiah, and their King, Jesus.

I believe it is at the end of this time that Jesus will return, rapture his Church, and descend to earth to rule and reign with all of his saints from Jerusalem in Israel for 1,000 years (**Revelation 20:6**—“⁶ Blessed and holy is the one who shares in the first resurrection! Over such the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ, and they will reign with him for a thousand years.”) of peace; **Isaiah 2:2-4** tells us that

“² It shall come to pass in the latter days
that the mountain of the house of the Lord
shall be established as the highest of the mountains,

and shall be lifted up above the hills;

and all the nations shall flow to it,

³ and many peoples shall come, and say:

“Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord,

to the house of the God of Jacob,

that he may teach us his ways

and that we may walk in his paths.”

For out of Zion shall go forth the law,^[a]

and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.

⁴ He shall judge between the nations,

and shall decide disputes for many peoples;

and they shall beat their swords into plowshares,

and their spears into pruning hooks;

nation shall not lift up sword against nation,

neither shall they learn war anymore.”

It is with this thousand-year reign of peace from Jerusalem that God will finally fill the earth with his glory and bring to completion his plan of redemption. After the thousand years is up, there is a final time of deception by Satan (duration unknown), and then Satan and those who follow him are thrown into the lake of fire and then humanity faces the Great White Throne of God as final judgment is cast and we all enter into eternity, either joining the devil in the Lake of Fire or joining Jesus and all of his glory in the New Heavens and the New Earth (Revelation 20-21). Now, we have reached a major turning point in our series as we have seen God's plan to bless the whole world through Abraham in response to our sin come to completion. This is the basis of the Bible: what God is doing. Therefore, when you are reading your Bibles, make sure you read them through the lenses of what God is doing, something you are hopefully now much more familiar with. Over the next 5 or 6 sessions, we will finish our series by covering what it is that God says; there are 7 ways that God has spoken to us through the Scriptures: 1) promise: Genesis 12-24; 2) Law; 3) Poetic Books; 4) Prophetic Books; 5) Gospel records; 6) Epistles (Rom-Jude); 7) Revelation.