

6. Jesus Ascends into Heaven

Acts 1:1-11

Matthew 28:16-20

¹⁶ Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. ¹⁷ And when they saw him they worshiped him, but some doubted. ¹⁸ And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in^[a] the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

Acts 1:1-11

In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach, ² until the day when he was taken up, after he had given commands through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen. ³ He presented himself alive to them after his suffering by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God.

⁴ And while staying^[a] with them he ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which, he said, “you heard from me; ⁵ for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with^[b] the Holy Spirit not many days from now.”

⁶ So when they had come together, they asked him, “Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?” ⁷ He said to them, “It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority. ⁸ But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” ⁹ And when he had said these things, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. ¹⁰ And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes, ¹¹ and said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.”

Luke 24:50-53

⁵⁰ Then he led them out as far as Bethany, and lifting up his hands he blessed them. ⁵¹ While he blessed them, he parted from them and was carried up into heaven. ⁵² And they worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy, ⁵³ and were continually in the temple blessing God.

the Kickoff of the Gospel to the Gentiles

Is the kingdom of God coming now?

The disciples were looking for the coming kingdom of God. Just as God had promised to David and Solomon they believed that the Messiah would come to overthrow the Roman rule and establish the kingdom of God on earth. They were looking forward to that time – all of Israel was looking forward to that time, but the belief that the disciples had that Jesus was the Messiah doubtless brought them to believe that the time was close and the reign of God was near.

The prophet Nathan spoke to David the promise that from Him the kingdom of God will be established forever.

2 Samuel 7:16

¹⁶ And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me.^[e] Your throne shall be established forever.’

Daniel 2:44

And in the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed, nor shall the kingdom be left to another people. It shall break in pieces all these kingdoms and bring them to an end, and it shall stand forever,

When he died on the cross they felt let-down. They were confused because they thought he was the one, but surely he couldn't be the one to redeem Israel if he was dead.

Luke 24:19-21

And he said to them, “What things?” And they said to him, “Concerning Jesus of Nazareth, a man who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people,²⁰ and how our chief priests and rulers delivered him up to be condemned to death, and crucified him.²¹ **But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel.** Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things happened.

Remember all of the times they fought about who was going to be the greatest in the kingdom?

Mark 9:33-37 (also Matthew 18:1-5 & Luke 9:46-48)

³³ And they came to Capernaum. And when he was in the house he asked them, “What were you discussing on the way?”³⁴ But they kept silent, for on the way they had argued with one another about who was the greatest.³⁵ And he sat down and called the twelve. And he said to them, “If anyone would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all.”³⁶ And he took a child and put him in the midst of them, and taking him in his arms, he said to them,³⁷ “Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me, and whoever receives me, receives not me but him who sent me.”

Luke 22:24-27

²⁴ A dispute also arose among them, as to which of them was to be regarded as the greatest. ²⁵ And he said to them, “The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them, and those in authority over them are called benefactors. ²⁶ But not so with you. Rather, let the greatest among you become as the youngest, and the leader as one who serves. ²⁷ For who is the greater, one who reclines at table or one who serves? Is it not the one who reclines at table? But I am among you as the one who serves.

After the resurrection they surged with enthusiasm that this was the time and the place. Jesus was now going to reveal himself as the true Messiah and going to set up this earthly kingdom. They were excited to be a part of it, and they wanted to see it happen first hand on earth today.

Acts 1:6

So when they had come together, they asked him, “**Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?**”

The disciples were not wishing their lives to be over, they were wishing that their faith would be vindicated and revealed to all men. That they would now be a part of the setting up of the kingdom of God on Earth. Imagine the excitement that they must have felt that they would now see this prophesy unfold in front of them. They wanted to see this happen, and they couldn't stop asking if now was the right time.

- 1. The disciples had plans for Jesus to now set up the kingdom of God (Acts 1:6). Do we sometimes have expectations for how God will work that don't seem to be God's plan for us?**
- 2. Are we willing to lay down our own plans for greatness (God's or ours) and submit to God's plans for our lives?**

The Promise was more than just Israel

God could have redeemed Israel right then, and established his kingdom just as the disciples wanted. He could have conquered Rome, and set up his eternal kingdom, but that was not his plan. The Jews had rejected Jesus, and killed Him, and Jesus preached that the Gospel will go to the Gentiles. Remember, Abraham was to be the father of many nations, and through Him All the nations of the world were to be blessed.

Genesis 17:4-7

⁴ “Behold, my covenant is with you, and you shall be the father of a multitude of nations. ⁵ No longer shall your name be called Abram,^[b] but your name shall be Abraham,^[c] for **I have made you the father of a multitude of nations. ⁶ I will make you exceedingly fruitful, and I will make you into nations, and kings shall come from you.** ⁷ And I will establish my covenant between me and you and your offspring after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you.

Genesis 22:15-17

¹⁵ And the angel of the LORD called to Abraham a second time from heaven ¹⁶ and said, “By myself I have sworn, declares the LORD, because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, ¹⁷ I will surely bless you, and I will surely multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore. And your offspring shall possess the gate of his^[d] enemies, ¹⁸ and in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, because you have obeyed my voice.”

The Covenant was about more than just Israel, it was about Nations, and all of the world. Jesus death and resurrection was to pay the price for all sin, not just for the sins of the Jews. The Gospel message was going to have to go to all the world before this kingdom is to be setup.

Romans 10 and 11 deal with the transition of the covenant from Israel to the Gentiles. The Gospel went to the Gentiles and we are in that era today.

Romans 11:11-12

¹ So I ask, did they stumble in order that they might fall? By no means! Rather through their trespass salvation has come to the Gentiles, so as to make Israel jealous. ¹² Now if their trespass means riches for the world, and if their failure means riches for the Gentiles, how much more will their full inclusion^[a] mean!

And also in **Romans 11:25-32**

²⁵ Lest you be wise in your own sight, I do not want you to be unaware of this mystery, brothers:^[a] a partial hardening has come upon Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. ²⁶ And in this way all Israel will be saved, as it is written,

“The Deliverer will come from Zion,
he will banish ungodliness from Jacob”;
²⁷ “and this will be my covenant with them
when I take away their sins.”

²⁸ As regards the gospel, they are enemies for your sake. But as regards election, they are beloved for the sake of their forefathers. ²⁹ For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable. ³⁰ For just as you were at one time disobedient to God but now have received mercy because of their disobedience, ³¹ so they too have now been disobedient in order that by the mercy shown to you they also may now^[b] receive mercy. ³² For God has consigned all to disobedience, that he may have mercy on all.

Jesus was not content to set up his kingdom then and wrap up all of created history. There was a whole other part of created history that God had planned that the disciples did not see. If they had their way, the kingdom of heaven would have been established on earth 2000 years ago and we would never have existed.

Two Thousand years of suffering and sin would have never happened. World Wars, Holocausts, massive outbreaks of plagues and sickness, tsunamis, volcanos, murders, deaths, and the like would never have occurred.

Also, two thousand years of sinners turned to saints would have never come to know Jesus. Literally millions upon millions of people entered the kingdom of God in the past two thousand years because of the second half of the Gospel plan.

- 3. If Jesus set up the kingdom at this time, two thousand years of suffering, wars and death would have been avoided. This seems like a good thing, but also two thousand years of sinners would have never come to Jesus. We would not be here and have the lives that God has given us. How does this help us to understand God's sovereign plan in a wicked world?**
- 4. Does this help us to understand a little bit about why do bad things happen to good people?**

Sin, in many ways, points us to God for justice. Hardship tends to point us to God. The history of the past two thousand years is God's unfolding plan to draw all of the world to himself.

Revelation 11:13 shows us the correct response to tribulation and suffering –

¹³ And at that hour there was a great earthquake, and a tenth of the city fell. Seven thousand people were killed in the earthquake, and the rest were terrified and gave glory to the God of heaven.

Response to God's Plan

The plans of God are so much bigger than we can imagine. Who would have thought that through the disobedience and lack of faith of the Jews the Gospel would have spread to the Gentiles? Who would have thought that this rejection of Jesus by the Jews would be the source of the Gospel spreading to all nations? Who would have thought that God would work all of this together for the salvation of Gentiles AND Jews? The only response to this is worship.

Romans 11:33-36

³³ Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!³⁴ “For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?”

³⁵ “Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid?”

³⁶ For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.