

Acts 1:6-8

Introduction

Last week we began a series through the book of Acts. We titled this series “The Kingdom Comes.” The kingdom (kingdom of heaven / kingdom of God) is the universal and everlasting rule and reign of God over this earth in and through His Messiah. We saw last week that this kingdom has come already in the enthronement of the King and that this kingdom will come one day when the King Himself returns. But we also saw that this kingdom is coming even now in the King’s present rule and reign. The book of Acts is an account of the kingdom “coming” in the first days of the Apostles.

A longer title for the book of Acts might be this: The *acts* of **God**, in **Jesus Christ** the King, by the power of the **Holy Spirit**, *through His Apostles*—the Apostles whom the King Himself *chose* (Acts 1:2), and to whom the King Himself *appeared* (Acts 1:3a), and to whom the King Himself *spoke* of all the things concerning the kingdom (Acts 1:3b), and who were *commissioned* by the King Himself to speak and to act in His name as His witnesses (Acts 1:2, 8b), and who were *empowered* by the King Himself to fulfill this commission (Acts 1:4-5, 8a). So we read in verses 1-6:

I. Acts 1:1–6 — The first account, O Theophilus, I composed, about all that Jesus began to do and teach, until the day when He was taken up to heaven, after He had by the Holy Spirit given orders to the apostles whom He had chosen, to whom He also presented Himself alive after His suffering by many convincing proofs, appearing to them over forty days and speaking about the things concerning the kingdom of God. And gathering them together, He commanded them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, “Which,” He said, “you heard of from Me; for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.” So when they had come together, they were asking Him, saying, “Lord, is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?”

As the “entitled” Gentiles that we are, we can be very impatient with questions like this. Maybe we feel a little indignant, like the disciples did when James and John asked Jesus to give them the places of honor at His right and left hand. Or maybe we’re amused. Or maybe we’re sadly shaking our heads at the disciples’ continued blindness. Do they really think that the kingdom is only for them and for their people, the Jews, and not for us? Not for Gentiles? Don’t they know that Gentiles are of no less significance and importance than Jews? There are some who say, accordingly, that the disciples are totally misguided. Calvin writes, “There are as many errors in this question as words.” But are the disciples really so misguided. Is their question really so full of errors?

“Lord, is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom *to Israel*?” What does our reaction to this question tell us about ourselves? And what were the disciples really thinking? This morning, we’re going to try to enter into their mind—into their *psyche*—so we can understand. We’re going to try and be them.

II. Thinking like the disciples

We were born and raised Jews. We were born and raised as circumcised members of the people that Yahweh chose. We're children of Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, to each of whom Yahweh appeared and gave His promises. Abraham lived over 2000 years ago. Moses lived over 1400 years ago. We're an ancient people. Our history as God's chosen covenant people spans many generations. We were born and raised as members of this chosen people and so we pray with the words of King David, full of amazement and thanksgiving:

- 2 Samuel 7:23–24 — “What one nation on the earth is like Your people Israel, whom God went to redeem for Himself as a people and to make a name for Himself, and to do a great thing for You and awesome things for Your land, before Your people whom You have redeemed for Yourself from Egypt, from nations and their gods? Yet You have established for Yourself Your people Israel as Your own people forever, and You, O Yahweh, have become their God.”

As members of this people, Israel, we rejoice and are amazed that because of God's sovereign choice and election, to us “belongs the adoption as sons, and the glory and the covenants and the giving of the Law and the temple service and the promises, [and]... the fathers, and from [us] is the Christ [the Messiah] according to the flesh” (Rom. 9:4-5). We humbly exult with the words of Moses:

- Deuteronomy 4:7–8 — What great nation is there that has a god so near to it as is Yahweh our God whenever we call on Him? Or what great nation is there that has statutes and judgments as righteous as this whole law...?

Without any arrogance or self-righteous pride (assuming the very best), we *sing* with the Psalmist:

- Psalms 147:19–20 — [Yahweh] declares his word to Jacob, his statutes and rules to Israel. He has not dealt thus with any other nation; they do not know his rules. Praise Yah!

Does this mean that we think all circumcised Jews and their households will automatically be granted entrance into Messiah's kingdom at the resurrection? No! Does this mean that we think all Gentiles are excluded from experiencing to some extent the privileges that have been given to us? Not at all! As Jews, we love to pray with the words of King Solomon:

- 1 Kings 8:41–43 — “When a foreigner, **who is not of your people Israel**, comes from a far country for your name's sake (for they shall hear of your great name and your mighty hand, and of your outstretched arm), when he comes and prays toward this house, hear in heaven your dwelling place and do according to all for which the foreigner calls to you, in order that all the peoples of the earth may know your name and fear you, **as do your people Israel**.”

We don't begrudge the Gentiles any hope of salvation or any participation in our blessings, but we do know that apart from God's revelation of Himself in and through His covenant with *us* as His specially chosen people, the Gentiles—as *Gentiles*—would have “no hope” and be “without

God in the world” (Eph. 2:11-12). So we love to hear the confession of Rahab, the Caananite, when she spoke to the two Israelite spies whom she sheltered:

- Joshua 2:11 — “Yahweh *your* God, he is God in the heavens above and on the earth beneath.”

We love the story of Ruth, the Moabite, who said to her Jewish mother-in-law Naomi:

- Ruth 1:16 — “Where you go I will go, and where you lodge I will lodge. *Your* people shall be my people, and *your* God my God.”

We love the story of Naaman, the Syrian, who was healed of his leprosy in one of the rivers of Israel and who said to the prophet Elisha:

- 2 Kings 5:15, 17 — “Behold, I know that there is no God in all the earth *but in Israel*... Please let there be given to your servant two mule loads of earth, for from now on your servant will not offer burnt offering or sacrifice to any god but Yahweh.”

As Jews, we know that apart from God’s revelation of Himself in and through His covenant with us as His specially chosen people, none of these Gentiles—*as Gentiles*—could have any salvation. And yet stories like Rahab, and Ruth, and Naaman were comparatively few and far between. After the exile, when we were scattered among the nations, there was an increase in the number of Gentiles who converted to our faith and confessed Yahweh, the God of Israel to be the only true God. We were God’s chosen people. Yahweh was the God of Israel. The Gentiles—*as Gentiles*—were excluded from the hope of Israel and without God in the world. But insofar as the Gentiles came to believe that there was no other God in all the earth but the true God who was in Israel, then they could come to benefit from our hope.

Especially since the exile, our hope in the promised Messiah and king of Israel had grown. As faithful Jews we looked for a Messiah who would restore our people and establish Israel at the center of a world-wide kingdom of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit (cf. Rom. 14:17). We clung to prophecies like these from Isaiah and Ezekiel and Joel.

- Isaiah 44:2–5 (cf. 32:14-18) — “Fear not, O **Jacob** my servant, Jeshurun whom I have chosen. For I will pour water on the thirsty land, and streams on the dry ground; **I will pour my Spirit** upon your offspring, and my blessing on your descendants. They shall spring up among the grass like willows by flowing streams. This one will say, ‘I am Yahweh’s,’ another will call on the name of **Jacob**, and another will write on his hand, ‘Belonging to Yahweh,’ and name himself by the name of **Israel**.”
- Ezekiel 39:25–29 (cf. 36:24-28; 37:12-14) — “Thus says the Lord Yahweh: Now I will restore the fortunes of **Jacob** and have mercy on the whole house of **Israel**, and I will be jealous for my holy name. They shall forget their shame and all the treachery they have practiced against me, when they dwell securely in their land with none to make them afraid... I will not hide my face anymore from them, when **I pour out my Spirit** upon the house of **Israel**, declares the Lord Yahweh.”

- Joel 2:27–29 — You shall know that I am in the midst of **Israel**, and that I am Yahweh your God and there is none else. And my people shall never again be put to shame. And it shall come to pass afterward, that **I will pour out my Spirit** on all flesh [all **Israel**]; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions. Even on the male and female servants in those days **I will pour out my Spirit**.

The new age of the kingdom, we understood, would be the new age of the Spirit. Based on these prophecies, we envisioned the coming kingdom of the Messiah with a Jewish Israel at its center and the surrounding Gentile nations converted to Judaism and making annual pilgrimages to worship the God of Israel in Jerusalem.

- Isaiah 2:2–3 — It shall come to pass in the latter days that *the mountain of the house of Yahweh* 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, and many peoples shall come, and say: “Come, let us go up to the mountain of Yahweh, to the house of *the God of Jacob*, that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths.”

We pictured a kingdom where multitudes of Rahab’s and Ruth’s and Naaman’s would find salvation through God’s revelation of Himself in a New Covenant that He would make with us—with the Jews—as His specially chosen people (even as He had made the Old Covenant with us).

- Jeremiah 31:31, 33–34 — “Behold, the days are coming, declares Yahweh, when I will make a new covenant *with the house of Israel and the house of Judah*... This is the covenant that I will make *with the house of Israel* after those days, declares Yahweh: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people... I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.”

We’re not being proud or arrogant. We know we did nothing to deserve being God’s chosen people. In fact, we deserved only to be cast off and rejected. But He chose us nonetheless and He swore to us that He would never cast us off, and we rejoiced in that. And so we waited for the fulfillment of all our hopes in our coming Messiah and the kingdom of righteousness and peace and joy that He would establish with a Jewish Israel at its center and the surrounding Gentile nations all streaming to the temple in Jerusalem to worship the God of Israel.

When Jesus, the Messiah, first called us and sent us out to preach, He instructed us:

- Matthew 10:5–7 — “Go nowhere among the Gentiles and enter no town of the Samaritans, but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. And proclaim as you go, saying, ‘The kingdom of heaven is at hand.’”

This made perfect sense to us. The kingdom was to be Israel’s kingdom. Gentiles would not be excluded, but we assumed that **before** the Gentile nations could begin streaming to Jerusalem, the kingdom would **first** have to be restored to Israel. Only *after* the kingdom was restored to Israel could the multitude of Rahab’s and Ruth’s and Naaman’s begin streaming to Jerusalem and finding salvation through God’s revelation of Himself in the New Covenant that He would make

with us. And so we believed it was in this way that the word Yahweh spoke so long ago to our father Abraham would be fulfilled:

- Genesis 12:3 — “...in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”

This had been our hope for many long centuries. This is how we envisioned the new age of the Spirit and Messiah’s kingdom throughout the generations of our fathers. This is what it meant to us to be Jews—to be the chosen people of God.

After the death and resurrection of Jesus, He came to us on a mountain in Galilee and gave us a very different set of instructions than He gave us at the beginning. Now He told us:

- Matthew 28:18–19 — “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations...”

We assumed what this meant was that Jesus was about to restore the kingdom to Israel. Can you see why? We assumed that only **after** the kingdom had been restored to Israel would it be possible to make disciples of all nations (whatever that might look like). For a period of forty days after the resurrection, Jesus appeared to us at different times and spoke to us about the things concerning the kingdom of God.

- Luke 24:45–47 — He opened [our] minds to understand the Scriptures [when He] said to [us], “Thus it is written, that the Christ [Messiah] should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem.”

But still we assumed that before this Gospel could be proclaimed to the nations beginning from Jerusalem, Jerusalem itself would have to be liberated from heathen occupation and restored as the city from which Jesus would establish His kingdom of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. Only **after** the kingdom had been restored to Israel could the kingdom *then* be proclaimed to the Gentile nations (whatever that might look like). Only *then* could the Rahab’s and the Ruth’s and the Naaman’s begin flowing to Jerusalem. Finally:

- Acts 1:4–5 — Gathering [us] together, [Jesus] commanded [us] not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, “Which,” He said, “you heard of from Me; for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.”

It was those words about not leaving Jerusalem and being baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now that finally emboldened us to ask the question that was on all our minds:

- Acts 1:6 — “Lord, is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?”

Can we see, now, how the disciples’ question is perfectly understandable? They assume that it *must* be at this time that Jesus will restore the kingdom to Israel if they themselves are soon to be proclaiming the kingdom to the Gentiles. And yet the very fact that they’re asking this question betrays their uncertainty. Why has Jesus waited this long? Why has He not been more clear about

the timetable? “Lord, is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?” Only now that we understand how perfectly reasonable is the disciples’ question can we understand—and rejoice—in the answer Jesus gives.

III. Acts 1:7 — But He said to them, “It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has set by His own authority...”

Can we see now how strange this answer must have seemed to the disciples? How was the timing of the kingdom’s restoration to Israel not something important for them to know when Jesus Himself was calling them to proclaim this kingdom to all the nations? Jesus knows exactly what the disciples are thinking. On the one hand, He knows they’re still thinking that He’s going to stay with them forever and that the kingdom must be coming soon—suddenly, climactically, and fully. So He says to them, “It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has set by His own authority...” The timing of the restoration of the kingdom to Israel *in its climactic fullness* is not for the disciples to know — whether it’s to be soon or whether it’s still a long way off (Acts 1:11). So naturally—obviously!—the disciples must assume that there’s nothing for them to do until that unknown day when the kingdom is climactically restored to Israel. Right?

“It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has set by His own authority,” Jesus says...

IV. Acts 1:8a — “...but you will receive power **WHEN THE HOLY SPIRIT HAS COME UPON YOU** [*epelthontos... pneumatos eph hymas (eperchomai... pneuma epi sy)*] [‘not many days from now’]...”

Jesus quotes from a prophecy in Isaiah about the restoration of the kingdom to Israel.

- **Isaiah 32:14–15 (LXX)** — As for the rich city, the houses are deserted; they shall abandon the wealth of the city, and the pleasant houses: and the villages shall be caves for ever, the joy of wild donkeys, shepherds’ pastures; until **the Spirit shall come upon you** [*epelthe eph hymas pneuma (erchomai epi sy pneuma)*] from on high...

V. Acts 1:8b — “...but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you [‘not many days from now’]; **and YOU SHALL BE MY WITNESSES** [*esesthe mou martyres (eimi ego martyrs)*]...”

Jesus quotes from another prophesy in Isaiah about the restoration of Israel.

- **Isaiah 43:11–12** — “Thus says Yahweh, he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel: “Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine... I, I am Yahweh, and besides me there is no savior... and **you are my witnesses** [*hymeis emoi martyres (sy ego martyrs)*],” declares Yahweh, “and I am God.”

VI. Acts 1:8c — “...but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you not many days from now; and you shall be My witnesses **both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and**

Samaria, and EVEN TO THE END OF THE EARTH [*heos eschatou tes ges (heos eschatos ho ge)*].”

Jesus quotes from a third prophecy in Isaiah about the restoration of the kingdom to Israel.

- Isaiah 49:5–6 — And now Yahweh says, he who formed me from the womb to be his Servant, to bring Jacob back to him; and that Israel might be gathered to him... “It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to bring back the preserved of Israel; I will make you as a light for the nations, that my salvation may reach **even to the end of the earth** [*heos eschatou tes ges (heos eschatos he ge)*].”

What Jesus is saying, then, is that even though the kingdom is not yet coming climactically, it is about to be coming with power and spreading throughout all the earth. Do you see now, how Jesus is completely reversing the expected order of things?

- Acts 1:6–8 — “Lord, is it at this time that You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?” ... “It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority. 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.”

The disciples assumed that only *after* the kingdom had been restored to Israel could the kingdom *then* be proclaimed to the Gentile nations. In this scenario, there would always remain a distinction between Jews and Gentiles in the kingdom. But what is Jesus saying now? He’s saying that only **after** the kingdom has been proclaimed to all the nations can the kingdom *then* be restored in its fullness to Israel (Acts 1:11). Why? What’s the connection here? Jesus is saying that, in fact, it’s *in and through* the kingdom being proclaimed to the nations that the kingdom is being restored to Israel and that the kingdom will one day be restored to Israel in its fullness. How will the kingdom be restored to Israel? Only as this kingdom is proclaimed to all the nations (cf. Mat. 28:18-19; Lk. 24:46-47).

The kingdom has come already in the enthronement of the King. The kingdom is coming now through the gathering in of people from all the nations under the King’s authority. And one day—the timing of which no one knows but the Father—the kingdom will come climactically when Jesus returns to reign in person over that vast multitude of people from all the nations that He has gathered in (Acts 1:11). It’s in His reign over this great multitude that the kingdom will be climactically and fully restored to Israel because it’s actually this great multitude that *is* the New Covenant Israel. The New Covenant (contrary to the Old Covenant) is a covenant made not just with ethnic Jews, but with people from every tribe and tongue and people and nation (Rev. 5:9-10; Heb. 8-9). And so the New Covenant Israel includes Gentiles like us on the same footing with Jews so that one can even say that in Messiah’s kingdom, “there is neither Jew nor Greek” (Gal. 3:28; cf. 1 Cor. 12:13). We’re all together, now, God’s *chosen* people. To say that Yahweh is the God of Israel *is* to say that He is *our* God.

- Galatians 6:15–16 — For neither circumcision [being a Jew] counts for anything, nor uncircumcision [being a Gentile], but **a new creation**. And as for all who walk by this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, and upon **the [New Covenant] Israel of God**.

Conclusion

When we hear the disciples asking Jesus, “Lord, is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?” do we respond with humility and understanding (cf. Mat. 15:24-28)? Would we have been willing to have the attitude of the Canaanite woman, who said to Jesus, “Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters’ table” (Mat. 15:27).

And then, when we hear the answer that Jesus gives (an answer that the disciples still will not fully understand; cf. Acts 10, 15), do we respond with humble amazement and joy? With the Apostle Paul, we’ve been given “insight into the mystery of Christ, which was not made known to the sons of men in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit” (Eph. 3:4-5).^{*} And what is this mystery of Christ?

- Ephesians 3:6 — This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs [of the kingdom], members of the same body, and partakers of the [kingdom] promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel [the gospel of the kingdom; cf. Acts 8:12].

It’s easy for us today to think of the church as something essentially Gentile rather than Jewish. But we need to remember the Jewish roots of the church—the Jewish roots of the kingdom—and stand in humble awe that we, the wild olive shoots have been grafted, contrary to nature, into Israel’s cultivated olive tree (Rom. 11:17-18, 24). Rather than be arrogant, we ought to stand in humble amazement at the fact that it’s *in this way* that the kingdom is being restored to Israel (cf. Rom. 11:25-26). In this New Covenant Israel there is now “neither Jew nor Gentile, for [we] are all one in Christ Jesus. And if [we] are Christ’s, then [we] are Abraham’s offspring, heirs [of the kingdom] according to promise” (Gal. 3:28-29).

- Romans 9:22–24 — What if God, desiring to show his wrath and to make known his power, has endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, in order to make known the riches of his glory for vessels of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory—even us whom he has called, not from the Jews only but also from the Gentiles?
- Romans 11:33–36 — Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! “For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?” “Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid?” For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.

^{*} This mystery was hidden in the typological language and world of the Old Covenant as well as in the “telescoping” language/perspective of Old Testament prophecy. With the coming of the New Covenant, the veil has been pulled away and we can see the “mystery of Christ” now even in the Old Covenant Scriptures.