

The Power of the Ascension

Ps. 110:1; Rom. 8:31-34

Introduction – The Ascension Type

Just before Jesus ascended to sit at the Father's right hand, He told His disciples that the Spirit would come upon them, and He commissioned them to be His witnesses to the world. The ascension of Jesus was both the completion of His work (cf. Heb 10:11ff) and the kickoff of the gospel takeover. This pattern of ascension and advancement of the kingdom is not unique to Jesus' ascension. In the Old Testament, this pattern or type is connected to God's covenant promises to Abraham (see Gen. 12, 15, and 17), specifically in the stories of Joseph, Moses, and Elijah. This helps us to see how Jesus' ascension is tied to the fulfillment of the covenant promises of God and what that means for us as His people.

Joseph

Joseph is sold into slavery and thought to be dead by his father and brothers. Through his apparent death and God's raising him out of bondage, Joseph delivers his family, the family of Israel. But Joseph's story is not just a death and resurrection type. God raises Joseph from the dead and sets him up as the ruler of Egypt, second only to Pharaoh (Gen. 41:40). Through this, not only is the house of Israel saved, but it is given a dwelling place in which they grow and eventually become "exceedingly mighty" (Ex. 1:7). Through Joseph's ascension to power as supreme ruler, the small band of Israelites will become a great nation (Gen. 46:3, Deut. 10:22). And, due to Joseph's ascension to power, "all the earth" comes to Joseph in Egypt and is blessed through his work (Gen. 41:57).

There are several parallels to Jesus' ascension. Joseph was appointed a supreme ruler in Egypt, and Jesus, in His ascension, is crowned as King over all people and has been given the name above every name (Ps. 110:1, Matt. 28:18, Phil. 2:9-11). Through Joseph's rise, Israel became a mighty people. Jesus tells His disciples that it is better for Him to go (to ascend) so that they would receive the power of the Holy Spirit (Luke 24:49, John 16:7). In His coming, the Spirit convicts the world (John 16:8-11), and it is by this Spirit that Jesus' disciples and followers since that time are empowered to grow the church through the conversion of the nations such that the true children of Abraham are an innumerable multitude (Rev. 7:9).

Moses

Moses leads the people of Israel out of bondage. After about forty years in the wilderness, Moses commissions the people just before they enter the promised land. He lays hands on Joshua, who receives the spirit of wisdom (Deut. 34:9). Moses himself does not enter the promised land with Israel, but ascends Mount Nebo, dies, and is buried by God in a place where no one is able to find his body. God commissions Joshua to lead the people into the land (Josh. 1:2) and tells him that He (God) will not leave him (Josh. 1:5). Joshua then leads the people of Israel into their promised land of Canaan.

Similarly, Jesus, having delivered His people from their sins, spends forty days with His followers (Acts 1:3). At the end of this time, He commissions them to go into Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the ends of the earth, declaring also, like Yahweh to Joshua, that He will

be with them always (Matt. 28:18-20). This is the new land, the new inheritance for the new Israel. Jesus then ascends, and the Spirit descends, empower the disciples. In Eph. 1:17, Paul prays that the Father would give to His people a spirit of wisdom (like Joshua) to understand all that God has done for them through Christ's death, resurrection, and establishment at God's right hand. As with Moses, Jesus' ascension kicks off and empowers the advance of God's people into the promised land.

Elijah

A third ascension type is the story of Elijah's ascension (2 Kings 2). At the end of his life, Elijah goes out of Israel and is caught up by a whirlwind and fiery chariot. His disciple, Elisha, asks for a double portion of Elijah's spirit, which is granted. Elisha returns to Israel and continues the work of Elijah, fighting against the idol worshippers in Israel. But, not long after Elisha begins his ministry, he is approached by Naaman the Syrian who is seeking to be cleansed from his leprosy (2 Kings 5). Naaman washes in the Jordan River and is cleansed and healed by the waters of Israel. Because Elijah ascended, Elisha was given the spirit and was used by God to cleanse a powerful Gentile. Strikingly, Elisha's servant Gehazi is offended at Elisha's grace to the Gentile, that no penalty, no cost, is given to Naaman. He sees it as a missed opportunity to make bank. Because of this, Gehazi receives the uncleanness of the Gentile he despised. He is judged for being offended at the grace of God.

Like Elisha, the disciples are empowered by the Spirit of God soon after they watch Jesus ascend. Because Jesus ascended, His apostles were given the Spirit and told to go and cleanse the world. They go out to take the blessing of Jesus and the gospel to all nations. The earliest controversies within the church had to do with the free gift of salvation being extended to the Gentiles (Acts 15). But if Jesus paid it all, and He has ascended and sat down at the right hand of God, then there is no additional payment needed for the forgiveness of our sins (Heb. 10:11-18). It is all given freely.

Conclusion

Jesus has ascended. He intercedes for us before God and also has given us the commission to advance His kingdom into the world: growing the chosen people of God (great nation) by baptizing and discipling the nations (blessing) of the whole world (the promised land). And He has given us the Spirit in order to accomplish these things.

Jesus is King, and this should give you great boldness. "Who is he that condemns? It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, *who is even at the right hand of God*, who also makes intercession for us. Who then shall separate us from the love of Christ?" (Romans 8:34-35a). Paul's answer is, Nothing! Jesus is King, so love the nations and give grace and forgiveness freely. Jesus is King, so spread the gospel without fear. Jesus is King, so count yourself dead to sin and alive by the Spirit as you grow (dare I say, ascend) toward your final glorification. Jesus is King, so feed the hungry. Jesus is King, so clothe the naked. Jesus is King, so disciple and discipline your children. Jesus is King, so eat and drink joyfully to His glory. Jesus is King, and the world is His—so the world is yours.