

New Testament Overview

I. Act 4: Coming of King Jesus: Redemption Accomplished & Kingdom Renewed

A. The Life of Jesus according to the Gospels

- Descendant of Abraham and David (Matt. 1:1-17; Luke 3:23-38) and born in David's hometown, Bethlehem, to the virgin Mary (Matt. 1; Luke 1-2).
- Grew up in the northern small town of Nazareth near Galilee and worked with his adoptive father Joseph as a builder (Matt. 13:55; Mark 6:3).
- Baptized by his cousin, John the Baptist, the last of the line of OT prophets.
- Traveled throughout the land of Judah for 3 years as a prophet and teacher (rabbi) proclaiming the arrival of the kingdom of God and teaching the word of God authoritatively. The central focus of his teaching was his claim to the long-awaited Savior-King (Messiah) from David's line who would establish the promised new covenant eternally.
- From a group of several hundred followers, he gathered and lived with 12 men as his primary followers/students (disciples) and spent increasing time with them to train them to engage in his mission.
- Performed numerous miracles by healing the sick and lame, showing divine power over nature, driving out demons, and bringing the dead to life again.
- Engaged in dialogue and increasing conflict with various types of Jewish religious leaders (Pharisees, scribes, teachers of the Law) over their moral hypocrisy, their distortion of Old Testament with later rabbinic traditions, their lack of mercy and love for other Jews and Gentiles, and (above all) his teaching about the kingdom of God and his identity as the Messiah.
- After 3 years, he entered Jerusalem in triumphant, public procession and enacted judgment against the Temple. The Jewish leaders convinced the Roman authorities to arrest him, and he was tried before both Jewish and Roman leaders. Though finding him innocent, the Roman governor Pilate crucified him as a political rebel to avoid a popular uprising by Jewish agitators.
- On the third day, Jesus rose from the dead, and over a period of 40 days he appeared repeatedly to groups of his disciples.

B. The Identity and Meaning of Jesus

(1) Israel fulfilled, embodying perfectly every aspect of Israel's covenant with God

- Jesus is ultimate prophet (Mt. 13:57/Lk. 4:24, 13:33), who revealed and interpreted the word of God calling people into covenant with God with a message of judgment and hope.
- Jesus is the greater temple (John 1:14, 2:18-22), the "place" where God dwells more fully and reveals himself more clearly and powerfully than anywhere else (Col. 1:19).
- Jesus is Israel's ultimate and final priest (Hebrews 5-10), the one who perfectly teaches God's word and leads God's people in worship, declaring God's forgiveness.
- Jesus is the ultimate Word of God made flesh (John 1:14), the fullest revelation of God not just in a written word but in a person (Heb. 1:2), the one whose life and teaching becomes the basis for the completion of God's written word in the Bible through his disciples.

- Jesus is the ultimate and final sacrifice (Hebrews 5-10; Romans 3:21-26, 8:3; Eph. 1:7, 1 Pet. 2:24), the God-man who offered himself as a substitute for us to take upon himself the full penalty and consequences of sin of all who believe and follow Jesus. His death accomplishes true cleansing from sin's guilt, and his resurrection is the source of eternal life and communion with God (Rom. 3-8; Gal. 2-4; Eph. 1-3; Col. 1-3; 1 Pet. 1-3; Heb. 1-10).
- Jesus is the ultimate king, the Messiah/Christ (Luke 2:11; Matt. 16:16-20; Acts 2:36; Eph. 2:20-23; Heb. 1:3-4, 8; Rev. 11:15; 19:16), the heir of David who fulfills God's covenant with David by defeating the enemies of sin, death, and Satan and reigning from heaven over God's eternal kingdom.

(2) Humanity fulfilled, a morally perfect human life in perfect relationship with God and others

Jesus fulfilled the mission of Israel by fulfilling the larger mission of humanity as a fully human person (John 1:14; Luke 3:23-38), the Second Adam (1 Cor. 15:45-49), resisting Satan's temptation and obeying where Adam and Eve failed (Matt. 4:1-11) in life and death (Phil. 2:1-11).

(3) God incarnate

Jesus is the conqueror of sin, death, and Satan and the Savior and Lord of humanity because he is more than merely human. He is the God-man, who possesses both fully divine and fully human natures united in the one person of Jesus. Numerous texts teach the full divinity of Jesus:

- Jesus performed divine actions: He did miracles that paralleled God's activity (e.g., stilling the storm, turning water to wine, bringing the dead to life). He forgave sins (Luke 5) and taught and interpreted the law of God on his own authority (Matt. 5) and received worship. He claimed authority over God's angels, God's kingdom (Matt. 13:41), and God's Sabbath (Matt. 12); power over life and death (John 5:21, 11:25); and the right to sit on throne of divine authority (Mark 14:62/Daniel 7:13-14).
- Jesus has divine titles and descriptions: I AM (John 8:58 = Exod. 3:14); David's Lord (Matt. 22:41-46 = Ps. 110); Lord and God (John 20:28; Acts 2:36; Rom. 9:5; 1 Cor. 8:6; Heb. 1:8); the divine Word (John 1:1); Creator of all things (John 1:3; Col. 1:16); eternal (Col. 1:17); sustainer of creation (Col. 1:17; Heb. 1:3); the one before whom every knee will bow (Phil. 2:1-11 = Isa. 45:23); the exact representation of God's being (Heb. 1:3).
- The huge implications: Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life (John 14:6). He is the ultimate revelation of God, embodiment of Truth, and the source of salvation (because only God can save us).

II. Act 5: Church: Redemption Continues & Kingdom Grows

A. The history of the church according to the book of Acts

- Great Commission (Matt. 28:19-20; Acts 1:8): After his resurrection, Jesus instructed his disciples to make disciples of all nations (cf. Gen. 12:3), baptizing and teaching everyone to observe what Jesus taught and serving as his witnesses in Judea, Samaria, and the ends of the earth.
- Ascension (Acts 1): As his disciples watched, he ascended visibly to heaven (disappearing from sight) to reign over his church and the whole world as King and Priest (cf. 2 Sam. 7; Ps. 110) with a promise to return again to earth visibly for God's final judgment of humanity and the resurrection of God's creation.

- Pentecost (Acts 2): As the disciples of Jesus gathered in Jerusalem, Jesus manifested the presence of his Holy Spirit in a dramatic visible and audible way. A great wind blew, flames of fire appeared over the heads of the disciples, and they proclaimed the gospel of Jesus in different languages to the crowds gathered for the Jewish festival of Pentecost from all over the Roman empire. These phenomena from Mt. Sinai and the Tabernacle showed that the God of Israel dwells within the church of Jesus (and revealed more clearly that one God is a Trinity of Father, Son, and Spirit). Several thousand people became followers of Jesus and formed the church in Jerusalem.
- Mission in Judea (Acts 1-7): Under the leadership of Jesus' 12 disciples (apostles), the church worshipped God together, taught and learned the word of God as fulfilled in Jesus, shared fellowship in each other's homes and mutual support in each other's lives, and told others about Jesus to invite them to become his followers.
- Mission in Samaria (Acts 8-12): Persecution by Jewish leaders in Jerusalem sent Christians outward beyond Judea, and God led them to share the gospel of Jesus with Gentile people in Samaria and other regions beyond Judea. Many Gentiles converted as Jesus had promised in the Great Commission.
- Mission to the ends of the earth (Acts 13-28): After a dramatic personal encounter with the risen Christ, the highly educated Jewish scholar Saul of Tarsus became the apostle Paul. Paul led three long missionary journeys through Asia Minor, Greece, and Rome, starting many new churches among Jewish and Gentile people. Many Gentiles converted. Through Peter and Paul (and much internal controversy; cf. Acts 10-11, 15; Galatians 1-2) the church realized that many practices from the Law of Moses separating Jews from Gentiles (e.g., kosher diet, sacrifices, Temple) must pass away because the fulfillment of God's covenant brought Jew and Gentile together by a common faith in Christ into a new people with a new form for a new era of extending God's salvation to all peoples (as God had promised Abraham: Gen. 12:3). The apostles' letters in the New Testament to the churches explain how the person and work of Jesus and the Holy Spirit reveal the triune nature of the one God (Father, Son, and Spirit), how God has defeated sin, death, and Satan through the work of Jesus and the Spirit, and how the church is to live in the world.

B. The Identity and Meaning of the Church

(1) Israel fulfilled, embodying Israel's covenant with God

As followers of the Messiah/Christ in union with him, the church is the continuation of OT Israel in its expanded, universal, multi-ethnic form foretold by the prophets, the people who are members of Abraham's spiritual lineage in covenant with God (Rom. 2:6-29; 11:11-24; Gal. 3:29-4:7; 1 Pet. 2:9).

- The church is God's temple (1 Cor. 3:16-17, 2 Cor. 6:16-18, Eph. 2:19-22, 1 Pet. 2:5), the people where the presence of God/Jesus is to be found revealed most fully in the world.
- The church is a kingdom of priests (1 Pet. 2:5, 9, Rev. 1:6; cf. Exod. 19:6), representing God to the world and the world to God in order to worship God and lead others into right worship.
- The church is a people of the word of God, devoted to the reading and preaching of the word of God, both OT and NT (1 Tim. 4:13-16; 2 Tim. 3:14-4:2; Acts 2:42-47).
- The church is the people redeemed by Jesus' sacrifice (Rom. 3:25; 1 John 2:2; Heb. 9:11-10:25), delivered from sin's guilt and condemnation and declared righteous before God in Christ (Rom. 5:1-11; 8:1-3) and offering themselves as living sacrifices to God in lives of holiness (Rom. 12:1-2).

(2) Humanity fulfilled, the renewed people of the Trinitarian Creator and King

As followers of the resurrected Second Adam in union with him, the church is the center of renewed humanity where God's saving work in Jesus Christ by the Holy Spirit conquers sin and death so that we might find abundant life in him (John 10:10). In the church, God has begun to renew his image in us (Eph. 4:24; Col. 3:10) and to bestow eternal, resurrection life that transforms us to live according to God's good design & purpose for us as his creation (Rom. 6:8-11; 2 Cor. 5:17; Eph. 2:4-10; 1 Pet 1:3-9).

- The church is the people/family of God the Father (1 Tim. 3:15), adopted children (Rom. 8:15-17; Gal. 4:1-7) called to live as family members (1 Tim. 5:1-2).
- The church is the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:12-27; Eph. 1:23; 4:12; 5:30; Col. 1:24), called to embody the character and good deeds of Christ (Matt. 5:3-11; John 15:1-11; 2 Pet. 1:3-11) and live in unity of life and love with Christ and one another (Eph. 4:1-32; Col. 3:1-17).
- The church is the temple of the Holy Spirit (Eph. 2:21-22, 2 Cor. 6:16, 1 Cor. 3:16-17), called to reflect the holiness of God's presence and life in us in service to God and others (1 Cor. 6:19-20; Rom. 8:3-11; Gal. 5:22-23; 1 Pet. 4:7-12).
- The church is the center of Jesus' kingdom in the world (1 Pet. 2:9, Rev. 1:6), a heavenly culture/city (Phil. 1:27, 3:20) called to manifest the life of God's kingdom in every dimension of life throughout the whole world.

III. Act 6: Return of King Jesus: Redemption Completed & Kingdom Consummated

The New Testament adds to OT prophecy in foretelling a future time when God's saving work will be complete and God's kingdom will fully transform the whole creation for eternal life and glory.

- Jesus' 2nd coming: Jesus will leave heaven and return to earth in a visible, bodily manner (Matt. 25; Acts 1:11; 2 Thess. 1:10; Heb. 9:28; Rev. 19)
- Resurrection: God will raise all of the dead to life again, restoring physical bodies to human souls torn from bodies by physical death (Dan. 12:2; John 5:25-29; Acts 24:15; Rev. 20:12-13).
- Final judgment: God will judge humanity with impartial justice (Rom. 2:6-11). Everyone united to Christ by trust/faith in God's saving grace and bearing the fruit of that living faith will be saved into eternal blessedness. Everyone who refused to repent and receive God's saving grace by faith will receive the just consequences for their sin (both past and ongoing) in the darkness and anguish of hell forever, and human sin will never again corrupt God's purified, good creation (Matt. 25:41-46; Rom. 2:8-9; 2 Thess. 1:8-9; Rev. 20:11-15).
- Eternal life and glory: God will transform the whole physical creation to become perfectly good and immortal, and the consummation of God's purpose for creation will arrive in eternal triumph (Isa. 25:6-9; Rom. 8:18-25; Rev. 21-22). God will dwell fully with his people in perfect communion. The entire earth will become a place where the fullness of God's presence, majesty, beauty, power, and love will be fully revealed in every place. All sin, suffering, and death will be totally eradicated. All of God's people will be restored to the fullness of God's image and likeness, and every aspect of life in the renewed creation will perfectly reflect and manifest God's glory, justice, and peace. Humanity will serve Christ and reign with Christ in active work to continue growing in developing our gifts and relationships and all the potential of God's creation forever.