

What Do We Do When Our Expectations and God's Plans Don't Align?

Acts 1:6-11

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So, when they had come together, they asked him, "Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" He said to them, "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."

- Acts 1:6-8, ESV

The disciples had a problem. They were overwhelmed with joy when Jesus rose again from the dead and appeared to them. Now, He was going away. Their hopes and expectations of the Messiah's kingdom had been on a roller-coaster ride over the previous weeks:

- About 47 days before, they had walked into Jerusalem with Jesus as the crowds cheered, "Hosanna! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!"
- Just a few days later, they had seen the crowds turn on Him and Pontius Pilate wash his hands of Him. They had fled and been scattered when the guards came to the Garden of Gethsemane to arrest Him. They had locked themselves in the upper room when Jesus was buried.
- Ever since His resurrection, their sorrow turned to joy and their fear to expectation.

Given all they had been through, it was the most normal thing for them to ask Him in hope: "*Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?*" But so often what seems "most normal" to us is miles out-of-step with God's plans and purposes.

Notice that Jesus does not even answer their question at all. He does not rebuke them or engage them in a debate about the nature of His kingdom. He simply gives them a promise and tells them what they are supposed to do: They would receive power when the Holy Spirit would come upon them and they would be His witnesses. Until then, they would have to wait and trust.

In Jesus' promise to the disciples, we are given an outline for the flow of the Gospel in the book of Acts: "*you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.*" The early chapters focus on Jerusalem (Ch. 1-7). Then, as the church is persecuted, the Gospel expands to Judea and Samaria (Ch. 8-12). Finally, it reaches through the empire all the way to Rome (Ch. 12-28).

So, what do we do when we find ourselves in a place of unmet expectations? How should we handle a lack of alignment between God's plans and our own? Some people would say you just need to pray harder, believe harder, making God bless your plans and priorities. The Bible seems to offer a different perspective.

It is true that often God calls us to persevere in prayer, even for years. At other times, though, we need to step back and ask: What has God promised? What has God commanded? How should I be praying? In other words, we need to dig into His word, seeking to align our desires with His kingdom plans and purposes.

Once we've done that, we may then need to wait. It is His kingdom, after all. Any power to do His work must come from Him!

Heavenly Father, remind us today that You are the sovereign God, ruler of all. Your kingdom and glory, advanced through the Gospel of Your Son, must be our core priority. Teach us from Your word how Your kingdom priorities should shape our desires and our expectations. Align our hearts' desires with Your own. In Jesus' name, Amen!