

“Epiphany: God’s Revealing in Human History”- Part 2

The second Sunday of the Epiphany season – Jan 17, 2021

Holy Trinity Church - Tom Mount

Introduction

- “Epiphany: God’s Revealing in Human History - Part 2”
- Last week, we talked about these three insurrections that involved a coordinated effort between humans and *elohim*: Gen 3, Gen 6 and Gen 11.

Setting the scene

- **The Ziggurat of Babylon episode was a decisive event. It led to God temporarily disinheriting the nations, who made it clear by their actions that they had no intention of living in relationship with the one true God. So, for the next 2,000 years, God set the nations to the side so he could create and cultivate a distinct people group descending from a single couple from southern Iraq named Abram and Sarai.**

- During this time, God “allowed all of the nations to walk in their own ways” (Acts 14:16). God “gave them over” (Rom 1:24,26,28) to their sinful desires and the consequences of their choices.

- God put the nations under the care of members of the divine council.

Deuteronomy 32:8-9

**“When the Most High gave to the nations their inheritance,
when he divided mankind,
he fixed the borders of the peoples
according to the number of the Sons of God.
But Yahweh’s portion is his people,
Jacob his allotted heritage.”**

Textual note: some later MSS have “according to the Sons of Israel”

- Some or all of these *elohim* council members became corrupt.

Psalm 82.2-4

**“How long will you judge unjustly
and show partiality to the wicked?”**

**³ Give justice to the weak and the fatherless;
maintain the right of the afflicted and the destitute.**

**⁴ Rescue the weak and the needy;
deliver them from the hand of the wicked.”**

- God’s dispossessing of the nations was always meant to be a temporary measure. Yahweh would later re-inherit these nations. This would entail three movements, two of which have already occurred and one which has yet to take place.

Three movements in the triune God’s work of salvation

1. God creates a new people group, Israel, to become the “womb” of the future Messiah or the world Savior.

- God chooses the most unlikely couple, Abram and Sarai, to create this people group (Josh 24:2). They came from from Ur in southern Iraq, center of moon worship (the god Sin or Nanna). Yet God creates a “Royal Grant” covenant relationship with them, promising them progeny, property, protection and prosperity (Gen 12:1-9; 15:1-21; 17:1-22).

- His initial calling of Abram and Sarai telegraphs his ultimate intent:

Genesis 12:1-3

“Now Yahweh said to Abram, “Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. ² And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. ³ I will bless

those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”

- After Abraham and Sarah come Isaac and Rebekah, then Jacob and his family, who move to Egypt to escape famine. There, for four hundred years, God isolates his people to meld them as a “nation” with a common identity and set of experiences.
- After rescuing them from corvée labor in Egypt, God enters into a “Suzerain-vassal” type covenant relationship with Israel, complete with 613 *mitzvot* or laws regulating every aspect of the people’s behavior. Unlike a Royal Grant covenant, this one is bilateral and conditional, requiring a reciprocal demonstration of *hesed* (covenant faithfulness and love). “Holiness” was the hallmark of the covenant.
- God leads the nation into Canaan, where the Israelites eliminate most of the descendants of the Nephilim giant clans (called Anakim or Amorites).
- Israel doesn’t eliminate all of these Nephilim, and they—as well as the surrounding nations—entice Israel to worship subservient *elohim*, practice idolatry and engage in immorality (cf. Ps 106:32-39). The Israelites lose their distinctiveness, their holiness, violating their covenant with Yahweh, which results in multiple chastisements, including exile.
- Despite Israel’s infidelity, God patiently bears with the people and promises to enact a “New Covenant” that will replace the Old. It will include, not just believing Israel, but all who pledge their unwavering loyalty to the one true God (Jer 31:31-40; Ezk 36:24-38). Under the terms of this covenant, he will forgive their sins and fill them with his Spirit so that his will and his *mitzvot* are internalized in their hearts (2 Cor 3:3-18).

2. God begins to re-inherit the nations through the ministries of Jesus and the Holy Spirit.

- Jesus was born to be the glory of Israel and the light of revelation to the Gentiles (Lk 2:25-32). Gentiles were part of Jesus’ pedigree, and, at his birth, the Gentile magi came to worship him (Mt 1:5-6; 2:1-12).

- While Jesus himself was “sent only to the lost sheep of Israel” during his brief 2 ½ - 3 ½ year itinerant ministry “in the flesh,” he telegraphed the broader scope of his post-ascension ministry (Mt 15:24). After his resurrection, Jesus explicitly announced to his disciples the worldwide scope of their continuance of his ministry (Mt 28:18-20; Acts 1:8).
- On the night of his betrayal, Jesus introduced the long anticipated New Covenant promised by the prophets (Lk 22:20). But instead of 613 commands, this covenant came with just one command, the “New Commandment” (Jn 13:34-35).
- At Pentecost, Jesus and the Father “poured out” the Holy Spirit into Jesus’ (Jewish) followers (Acts 2:1-41). The Holy Spirit was being given to all of them regardless of age, sex, vocation, or spiritual maturity. And, the Spirit was given to them permanently, to reside “in” them (Jn 14:17; cf. 1 Sam 10:6). Later, the Samaritan “Pentecost” (Acts 8:14-17) and Gentile “Pentecost” (Acts 19:1-7) proved that God was reclaiming all the nations disinherited in Genesis 11, not just saving Jews, because the gift of the Holy Spirit was the proof (Acts 15:6-9).
- In the earthly ministry of Jesus and the ongoing ministry of the Spirit, then, the triune God began in earnest the process of saving the world. Today, the kingdom of God is “among” us and is in the process of being “built” by Christ, but it is not yet dominant on earth. Our king reigns in heaven, not on earth. Here, we experience many setbacks. Evil spirits still hassle us. Malevolent principalities and powers still wield power over large sectors of society. Yet the Church continues to grow and carry the Gospel to all nations as we wait for the King to return!

3. God will complete his re-inheritance of the nations through the *parousia* (appearing) or Second Coming of Jesus.

- Jesus’ first coming was stealthy and humble. His second coming will be spectacular, triumphant for his saints and terrible for his foes (2 Thess 1:5-10).

- When Christ returns, he will defeat his enemies and make them “his footstool” (1 Cor 15:25). He will sit on David’s throne and judge all humans and *elohim* for what we have done during our lifetimes (2 Cor 5:10; Rev 20:11-15). After this, he will reign with his whole family—believing humans and faithful *elohim*—over a renewed heaven-earth (Rev 21:1-27).
- On this renewed earth, believers will live in face-to-face intimacy with the Father and Son in the Spirit, with one another and with the *elohim* forever. We will have important and immensely satisfying vocations and will reign with Christ over the earth. God’s shalom will pervade all. This is what salvation is all about!

Take aways

- Be amazed at the inscrutable wisdom and indomitable love of God for us (Rom 11:33-36)! Trust him to guide, protect and provide for all your needs.

Exodus 15:11

Who among the gods
is like you, O Yahweh?
Who is like you—
majestic in holiness,
awesome in glory,
working wonders?

Recommended resources

- The Bible Project video series on “Spiritual Beings”:
<https://bibleproject.com/explore/spiritual-beings/>
- Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible (PDF):
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/254783182_Dictionary_of_Deities_and_Demons_in_the_Bible
- Heiser, Michael. *Unseen Realm* (footnoted); *Supernatural* (distillation of *Unseen Realm*)

- Heiser, Michael. YouTube videos:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IZKy1Xt2Ow0> (Part 1 of 4 hour long talks;
there are many others on YouTube as well)