

A Possible Answer to Three Questions:

- 1) Did the Gospel spread to the entire world in less than 40 years from when the church began?
- 2) If so, how did that happen before technology?
- 3) Did Enoch and Elijah not die and go to heaven when they were “taken up” and “were not”?



By Joshua Stucki, referencing:

The Gospel Unashamed, Vol. 21, No. 1, January, 2008, George L. Faull, Rel. D. editor

Colossians: Know the Mystery of God by Kendall Faull

And Original Research

Restoration Movement Literature

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Colossians 1:23 ends with this thought: “This is the Gospel that you heard and that has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven...”

Jesus says something very similar in the Gospel of Matthew, chapter 24, verse 14, “And this Gospel of the Kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.”

These two verses are commonly quoted and interpreted to mean, “When the Gospel has been preached everywhere, then Jesus will come back.” This is commonly used by these preachers as a motivation to get people to evangelize and spread the Gospel everywhere, “to hasten Jesus’ return.” There are many reasons why this view is flawed (and false). However, because this idea is so common, it deserves a proper answer.

Interesting Fact:
Many in church history (including many in the early Restoration Movement) taught that by evangelizing the whole world more quickly, the return of Jesus could be hastened. However, this is false.

Let us start out with two verses that would contradict Colossians 1:23 and Matthew 24:14 if interpreted in the above manner:

Romans 10:18: “But I ask: did they not hear? Of course they did. Their voice has gone out into **all** the earth, their words to the **ends** of the world.”

Acts 2:5: “Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from **every** nation under heaven.”

So how can we understand what Scripture is telling us here? Do we have a contradiction, where Jesus will come back if the Gospel is preached everywhere, but Scripture tells us it already has been, or do we

have another understanding that harmonizes all of the Scriptures on this subject?

First, we must look at each of these verses in their context (both Scriptural and historical context). This will clear up many inconsistencies of thought. Second, we can look at some Scriptural stories that will clear up our overall thinking on the subject.

Let us begin with Matthew 24:14, repeated here for our reference: “And this Gospel of the Kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.”

“The end” is often assumed to mean “Jesus’ return.” However, that is not the context of what Jesus is speaking of. In Matthew 24:1+2, Jesus is speaking of the various physical buildings of Jerusalem. He had just left the temple (vs. 1) and His disciples were calling Jesus’ attention to the other buildings of the city (vs. 2). It is then that Jesus begins His teaching on the destruction of Jerusalem.

By the time we reach verse 14, we understand that “the end” is the destruction of Jerusalem. For Jesus’ people, it would be their end. For Jesus’ disciples, it would be the end of their home land, with their citizenship then being only in the Kingdom of Heaven (Hebrews 11:13+16). It was the end of many things, including the genealogical records of the Jews, forever sealing only Jesus as the proven descendant of David, the Promised Messiah of the Old Testament (Matthew 1 and Luke 3).

Important Rule of Interpretation:
Do not get ahead of the text. If the text can be applied to an event that is nearer to the time of the text, it should be given preference over an unknown, future event of speculative origin.

This helps us harmonize Colossians 1:23b: “This is the Gospel that you heard and **that has been proclaimed to every creature** under heaven...” We can understand from **this verse** that Matthew 24:14 **has been fulfilled**. Since we understand the Epistle to the Colossians had to be written before the earthquake that destroyed the town (62AD), Matthew 24:14 had been fulfilled. The 40-year probation of the Jewish people since Jesus’ death, burial, and resurrection was about over, and the historical destruction of Jerusalem was nigh (70AD).

However, the question is begged: How did the Gospel go into “the whole world” and “to all nations” (Matthew 24:14), “to the ends of the world” and “into all the earth” (Romans 10:18), and “to every creature under heaven” (Colossians 1:23) in such a short period of time, before the technology was around to greatly aid in that purpose?

Many commentators and authors throw up their hands and say, “I don’t know.” Or many stick to the faulty interpretation that Jesus was speaking of His return in Matthew 24:14, simply ignoring the immediate context of that passage and the verses that say the Gospel has already spread to all over the earth. This student does not believe this subject has been given justice by many, and will admit there is no “easy” answer. Nonetheless, we can develop “a working theory that fits the facts.”

First, let us assume a few things Scripture tells us and facts we know besides:

1) Jesus predicted the destruction of Jerusalem (Matthew 24:1-34, Mark 13:1-30).

2) The destruction of Jerusalem happened in 70AD.

3) Colossians was written before Colossae was destroyed by an earthquake, so before 62AD.

4) Colossians 1:23 says, “the Gospel...has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven...”

5) Romans 10:18 says, “...they did [hear]...their voice has gone out into all the earth, their words unto the ends of the world.” (Quoting Psalm 19:4 as a fulfillment of that prophecy)

So, if we are to understand these verses in harmony, the theory that fits is that the Gospel did go to every nation, to the ends of the earth, in only about 30 years time (from about 30AD to 60AD), fulfilling the prophecy of Psalm 19:4, as quoted by Paul in Romans 10:18 . What are we attempting to answer is “How could this have happened?”

Another thought...

Can God do anything? Yes (Luke 1:37, Matthew 19:26). So could God have spread the Gospel to every nation in the earth in 30 years? Sure. The only question we are really answering here is *how* He did it.

One theory that is commonly offered is that we are only talking about “the known world” of Bible times (David Lipscomb, of the Church of Christ Gospel Advocate commentary series, for example, takes this view). Otherwise, the theory is postulating that the Gospel had spread to the edges of the Roman Empire fulfills the prophecy of Psalm 19:4/Romans 10:18. While it is true that the Roman Empire believed and often said “it ruled the world”, we naturally know today that the entire Western Hemisphere was not under Rome’s control (or even knowledge) and of course much of East Asia and of course Australia was not under

Rome's control. So does this really qualify as preaching the Gospel "to every creature under heaven"? (Colossians 1:23)

Another theory that is offered (by skeptics and liberals) is that Paul was mistaken and simply was exaggerating or did not know world geography. While Paul likely did not know world geography like we understand it today, the liberal or skeptical scholar is clearly calling Paul a liar here. However, if we are to object to the skeptic's view, is there another legitimate possibility?

This student wishes to posit a possibility that will be shown to have Scriptural examples: **God could have "transported", or "translated", preachers (missionaries as we call them today) all over the world during the 30 years between when Colossians and Romans was written and the start of the church in Acts 2.**

What Scriptures support this position?

In Acts 8:26-40, there is the famous story of Philip and the Ethiopian Eunuch. An angel appears to Philip and tells him where to go ("the desert road that goes from Jerusalem to Gaza") to meet up with the Ethiopian Eunuch in order to witness to him. Of course, we know that Philip shared the Gospel with the Eunuch and baptized him, with the Eunuch leaving rejoicing (Acts 8:35-39). What happens after this is interesting to our question of God "transporting" preachers: in Acts 8:39+40, "the Spirit of the Lord suddenly took Philip away" (vs. 39) and "Philip appeared at Azotus" to preach the Gospel in that area.

Philip walked (Acts 8:26+27) to meet up with the Eunuch. Why not have Philip walk to Azotus? The only logical possibility is that Philip needed to get to Azotus quicker than he could get there on foot. Azotus is only 20 miles away; on foot, walking a mile every 30 minutes (a

leisurely pace), this would take only 10 hours. At most, two days. What was the rush? Apparently the preaching had to be done even faster than that; God saw to it he was there faster than even a day or two's walk would have got him there otherwise. From there, Philip went right on “preaching the Gospel in all the towns...” (Acts 8:40)

So we can establish two facts relevant to our study from Philip's story above:

- 1) God sends preachers so people can hear the Gospel.
- 2) God will even supernaturally “transport” a preacher if the Gospel needs to get there more quickly than any human effort could otherwise muster.

Interesting Fact:
Philip was supernaturally transported by God to preach in Azotus.

Jesus had predicted that the Gospel would be preached to all nations before the destruction of Jerusalem came (Matthew 24:14). As we have already discussed, the destruction of Jerusalem happened (70AD) about forty years from the birth of the church in Acts 2. By the time Colossians 1:23 and Romans 10:18 are written, this prediction of Jesus has been fulfilled, only after about 30 years from when the church began. In order for the Gospel to spread “to the ends of the world” (Romans 10:18), God had already transported one preacher (Philip) supernaturally to get the Word to Azotus faster than on foot; it stands to reason He did that very same thing to get His Son's prediction fulfilled well in time before the destruction of Jerusalem.

Are there other stories in Scripture to collaborate this theory?

For this possibility, I was reminded of an issue of *The Gospel Unashamed* by George L. Faull, Rel. D. Dr. Faull had discussed a change of mind he had concerning the “translation” of Enoch and Elijah. He states in this article that he was changing his mind in that Enoch and Elijah were not actually taken to heaven, but rather somewhere else on earth, supposedly to continue their ministries elsewhere than where they were before.

This will fly in the face of the typical understanding of Enoch and Elijah. For example, in Genesis 5:24, “Enoch walked faithfully with God; then he was no more, because God took him away.” Many will say this verse says that God took him to heaven; however, this *is an assumption of the reader*. In fact, it is a false assumption, because Enoch is listed with those died in faith, awaiting the promise (Hebrews 11:5-13). Hebrews 11:5 does say that Enoch “did not experience death”, but then says in verse 13 that he did actually die with the rest who are listed in those verses. The harmony of these verses means that Enoch did die a physical death, but he must have been spared the *experience* of it (Hebrews 11:5). Otherwise, it is possible that Enoch’s death might have been like Moses’, where Moses still had good eyes and strength, but died by the hands of God (Deuteronomy 34:5-7).

What about Elijah? 2 Kings 2:11 says, “As they were walking along and talking together, suddenly a chariot of fire and horses of fire appeared and separated the two of them, and Elijah went up to heaven in a whirlwind.” Many will say, “Look! See! Elijah went up to heaven! It says so right there in the verse!”

However, “heaven” is a word in Scripture that can mean many things. The Hebrew word for heaven is “hassamayim” and is used for describing anything in the Old Testament from the earth’s sky to where

God is. In fact, Genesis 1 uses the same word nine times to describe the physical sky such as Genesis 1:26, “and the birds of the air” (“of the air” being translated from the Hebrew word *hassamayim*). In fact, there are many more references in the Old Testament to *hassamayim* to meaning the earth’s physical sky than where God is, although it is used in both contexts through the Old Testament Scriptures.

Key Fact:

The Hebrew word for “heaven”, “*hassamayim*”, can be translated “sky” or “the place where God is.”

For example, it is translated “sky”, or “of the air” in Genesis chapter 1 nine (9) times.

So we cannot assume that Elijah was taken to where God is; 2 Kings 2:11 simply uses the word “*hassamayim*”, leaving us to understand if Elijah was taken “into the sky” and thus dropped off elsewhere or to where God is, in the context of the passage and the rest of the Bible.

We also must take Scripture at its word (taken from *The Gospel Unashamed, Vol. 21, No. 1, January 2008 edition, George L. Faull, Rel.D., editor*):

1 Corinthians 15:22 says, “In Adam all die.”

Hebrews 9:27 says, “It is appointed unto man once to die and after this the judgment.”

Romans 6:23 says, “The wages of sin is death.” Romans 3:23 says, “All have fallen short of the glory of God.”

Romans 5:12, 14, and 17 all say that by Adam sin entered into the world and death by sin; so death passed to all men for all have sinned.

And all this in context of Hebrews 11:38-39 where it says that all listed in Hebrews 11 (including Enoch by name in verse 5 and Elijah by reference in verse 38) died, not having yet received the promise. It says they all desired a better country, a heavenly one, but they would receive the promise with us.

Finally, John 3:18: “No man has ascended up to Heaven but He that descended from heaven, even the Son of Man which is in heaven.” And John 14:6, “No man can come to the Father but by Me.” Jesus had not yet come in Enoch’s or Elijah’s times, and so they did not go to heaven before Christ ascended back there again.

Therefore, based on the simple facts that no man has ascended to Heaven (John 3:18), that all men in fact die (1 Corinthians 15:22, Hebrews 9:27, and Romans 5:12, 14, and 17), we can safely conclude that in Genesis 5:24 and 2 Kings 2:11, Enoch and Elijah did not go where God is, but instead up to the sky, eventually to settle somewhere else.

What happened to Enoch and Elijah then? This part is speculation. However, Acts 2:5 says there were present in Jerusalem in that day “God-fearing Jews of every nation under heaven”. How were there Jews everywhere? One possibility is that God took faithful men like Enoch and Elijah and had them finish their ministries (and lives) as missionaries in foreign lands. Like this author said – *this is speculation*. However, it is a theory that fits the facts, and worthy one to consider in light of how also God managed to spread the Gospel to “ends of the world” (Romans 10:18) in less than 40 years time (Colossians 1:23).

We do know, however, that Elijah sent a letter *after* his translation: in 2 Chronicles 21:12, we read of a letter that Elijah wrote to the new king. New King Jehoram killed his brothers after King Jehoshaphat died

(2 Kings 3:11). The letter mentions specific sins of Jehoram and how he would die of issues of the bowels. We even have extra-Biblical affirmation of this by reference of Josephus who interprets the above the same way, only 4 years after Elijah's translation, instead of 5 years, as the author of 2 Chronicles says.

Key Fact:
Elijah wrote a letter <i>after</i> his translation (2 Chronicles 21:12).

This particular section of this work is not meant to fill the mind of the reader with wild imaginations. Instead, an attempt at critical research and reference has been made to explain away a common myth and ultimately offer a logical possibility how the Gospel spread to the whole world in such a short period of time after Jesus' ascension. What actually happened to Enoch, Elijah, and how God spread the Gospel to the ends of the earth so quickly is ultimately one of those secret things of God (Deuteronomy 29:29).

ANSWERS TO SOME OBJECTIONS

There are some legitimate (but answerable) questions with regards to whether Enoch and Elijah were "translated" to heaven or somewhere else on earth. The below will attempt to address these:

Many will look at Genesis 5:24 and read that Enoch "was not" for God "took him". The assumption is that "was not" is assumed to mean "taken to heaven", yet no other Scripture supports this view.

We read in Jeremiah 31:15 (quoted in Matthew 2:18 as fulfilled prophecy) that Rachel was weeping for her children, refusing to be comforted for her children, because they "were not". No one denies "were not" here means death.

As well, Job 7:21 says, "...I will soon lie down in the dust; you will search for me, but I will not be." Job is referring to the death he believes he will be soon to have considering his conditions at the time.

Psalms 37:35+36 discusses a wicked man "who was not". A wicked man certainly was not translated to heaven; rather, he died.

Some will refer to the transfiguration in Matthew 17:1-9 and say that since Elijah appears in this vision that he never died but was translated to heaven:

However, Moses definitely did die and was buried by God Himself (Deuteronomy 34:5+6).

The transfiguration was a vision, not a physical manifestation of Moses and Elijah. The resurrection for any man does not come until Jesus' second coming (Isaiah 26:19, Romans 8:23, 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18). The author of Hebrews tells us that all the faithful will inherit the promise with us (Hebrews 11:39-40). As well, some Biblical characters meet actual personages of Christ and angels like Abraham did in Genesis 18:2ff, other times they have visions like Daniel (Daniel 7, for example). One is not "less true" or "less real" than another although they do take on different forms.

Some will say that since Enoch "walked with God", translation to heaven was his reward. However, this same phraseology describes Noah (Genesis 6:9), Abraham (Genesis 17:1), and King David (1 Kings 9:4 and 2 Chronicles 7:17). Yet, no one denies these men died. Even after Jesus ascended, David had not yet done so (Acts 2:34).

Others will point to Hebrews 11:5 ("Enoch did not experience death") but then miss Hebrews 11:13 ("all these died in faith") that points out Enoch, along with the other faithful heroes of old, did indeed

die. We are just not told when or where (see below, this is how the ancient Jewish commentators also viewed their deaths). What is meant by the author of Hebrews describing Enoch as having not “experienced” death must therefore mean that he was spared any agony. This would be consistent with Moses’ death, where he died and was buried by the hand of God despite the fact that he was still physically strong (Deuteronomy 34).

The same word for “translate” or “move” (“enenu” in the Hebrew, or “metatitheste” in Greek) is used in Hebrews 7:12 but there it is translated “change” (“for the priesthood being changed, there is a change also of the law”).

Key Fact:
The Hebrew (“enenu”) and Greek (“metatitheste”) words for “move” or “translate” never mean “translate or move to where God is” in any Bible text. Therefore, it stands to reason the verses in question about Enoch and Elijah’s “translation” should be interpreted the same way.

Galatians 1:6 uses the same word but in the sense of “taken away”: “I marvel that you are so soon removed from him that I made of necessity a change of the law”.

Acts 7:16 – “...carried over into Sychem...”, speaking of Jacob’s sons carrying his remains to his permanent grave.

Colossians 1:13 – “...and has translated [brought] us into the Kingdom of His dear Son.”

Vine’s Expository Dictionary and Arndt’s and Gingrich’s Bible Dictionaries both translate the word referenced above (“enenu” in

Hebrew, or “metatithesthe” in the Greek) commonly to mean “to move to another place”.

As well, ancient historians such as Josephus (who was a Jew) never interpreted Elijah and Enoch to have went to heaven. Ancient commentary unilaterally says that simply when and where of their deaths was hidden in their translation. Josephus puts it, in *Antiquities*, 9:5:2, “Indeed as to Elijah and as to Enoch, who was before the deluge, it is written in the sacred books that they disappeared, but so that nobody knew that they died.”

The Jews to this day have a grave marked for Elijah (even they assume through their ancient commentators that it is merely a marker, not the grave itself) and some still observe a feast on the 10th day of the 2nd month of the Jewish calendar to commemorate the death of Elijah.

It is only commentators of the last 500 years or so (since the Reformation and Renaissance periods began) who have changed these long-understood interpretations of Enoch and Elijah. This is actually true of many doctrines and ideas (which is why many things must be suspect from that period, despite the good it did), but those things are outside the context of this particular study.

For further information, the reader is again referenced to George L. Faull’s work on the subject in *The Gospel Unashamed*, Vol. 21, No. 1, January 2008, winter quarterly edition. Much of the above was taken from this paper, along with some further research added to solidify the concepts shown.