

Up, Up and Away Where Did Jesus Go?

Jesus of Nazareth arose from the dead on the third day after his crucifixion and burial. For forty days he came and went in various meetings with his disciples. He concentrated on instruction to his chosen witnesses, the apostles. Luke summarizes these events in Acts 1:1, "I wrote the first narrative, Theophilus, about all that Jesus began to do and teach ² until the day he was taken up, after he had given instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen. ³ After he had suffered, he also presented himself alive to them by many convincing proofs, appearing to them over a period of forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God."

On the fortieth day he was taken back into heaven in full view of his apostles. Again, Luke records the event. *And he led them out as far as Bethany, and lifting up his hands he blessed them. While he blessed them, he parted from them and was carried up into heaven.* Luke 24:49 and Acts 1:9-11 *After he had said this, he was taken up as they were watching, and a cloud took him out of their sight. ¹⁰ While he was going, they were gazing into heaven, and suddenly two men in white clothes stood by them. ¹¹ They said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up into heaven? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come in the same way that you have seen him going into heaven."*

Mark summarizes in 16:19, "So then the Lord Jesus, after he had spoken to them, was taken up into heaven and sat down at the right hand of God." And Peter who was a witness that day testifies: Jesus Christ "*has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers having been subjected to him.*" 1 Peter 3:22

Peter with John, after their arrest and release from jail, testified boldly to the authorities: ³⁰ *The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom you had murdered by hanging Him on a tree.* ³¹ *God exalted this man to His right hand as Leader (ruler) and Savior, to grant repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins..* Acts 5:30-31

Before his death and subsequent resurrection Jesus had sought to prepare his followers for his leaving. In fact, when he began to call and collect his first disciples he spoke to Nathaniel in cryptic terms:

⁵⁰ Jesus responded to him, *"Do you believe only because I told you I saw you under the fig tree? You will see greater things than this."* ⁵¹ *Then He said, "I assure you: You will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man."*

Then there is his testimony to Nicodemus in his early Judean Ministry: *No one has ascended into heaven except he who descended from heaven, the Son of Man.* John 3:13

Following the midpoint of his ministry Jesus fed the multitudes that had followed him to a somewhat isolated spot. On the day after the feeding of the 5,000 Jesus gave a discourse explaining that he was the true bread from heaven that people must feed upon.

As a fallout of this sermon when many had walked away from following Jesus, we read in John 6:60ff, ⁶⁰ *When many of his disciples heard it, they said, "This is a hard saying; who can listen to it?"* ⁶¹ *But Jesus, knowing in himself that his disciples were grumbling about this, said to them, "Do you take offense at this?"* ⁶² *Then what if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before?* ⁶³ *It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is no help at all. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life."*

In the final year of his ministry at the feast of Tabernacles Jesus said, *"I am with you for only a short time, and then I am going to the one who sent me."* John 7:33

Just a day before his death, in the upper room just prior to his arrest in the garden, we read: "Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going back to God" (John 13:3) He spoke these words to his disciples:

"Very truly I tell you, whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father." John 14:12

John 16:27-28

"...for the Father himself loves you, because you have loved me and have believed that I came from God. I came from the Father and have come into the world, and now I am leaving the world and going to the Father."

Finally just a few hours before the final events began to unfold
(John 17:4-5,11) Jesus prayed to the Father anticipating his return and glorification:

I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do. And now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed...

And I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, keep them in your name, which you have given me, that they may be one, even as we are one.

Then after his resurrection at his first appearance he announces his soon ascension.

This was when he appeared to Mary Magdalene who had grasped his feet. Jesus said, "Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, '**I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.**'" John 20:17

From this wealth of information, we learn from Jesus that his return to heaven is of **supreme importance**. Both to himself and to us who believe in him!

First, with reference to Christ Jesus himself:

The ascension is his exaltation and proof that his work as our Savior by means of his suffering and death is real and it is finished. No sacrifice remains.

¹² He entered the most holy place once for all, not by the blood of goats and calves, but by His own blood, having obtained eternal redemption. Hebrews 9:12

²⁴ For the Messiah did not enter a sanctuary made with hands (only a model of the true one) but into heaven itself, so that He might now appear in the presence of God for us. He has appeared one time, at the end of the ages, for the removal of sin by the sacrifice of Himself. Heb. 9:24,26

All that was needed to ransom his people and to bring them into the fullness of salvation had been completed!

Second, with reference to us who believe on him, Christ is engaged as our Mediator. Since we are not yet completely removed from temptation and sin in this fallen world, Satan attempts to accuse us before the Father when we sin. However, Christ is our advocate, our mediator, and our high priest. 1 John 2:1 says: "...we have an advocate with the Father—Jesus Christ the righteous one." He pleads our case before God based on His perfect life and His shed blood. Therefore, we have him and his present ministry as our anchor within the veil. He has gone into heaven, He is at God's right hand with angels, authorities, and powers subject to Him. Thus, we are kept safe and secure. It is guaranteed by God that we will receive the inheritance he purchased for us.

Third, with reference to the future, in Jesus as the first-fruits and firstborn from the dead we have our flesh in heaven now. Those who believe are connected to him by faith. In the resurrected, ascended Jesus we have our flesh in heaven as a sure pledge that He, our Head, will also take us, His members, up to Himself. *When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.* Colossians 3:4

Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be, has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. 1 John 3:2

In the words of the Heilberg Catechism, *we have our flesh in heaven as a sure pledge that He, our Head, will also take us, His members, up to Himself.*

Kevin DeYoung in ***The Good News We Almost Forgot: Rediscovering The Gospel In A 16th Century Catechism*** stressed this hopeful reality brought to us by Christ's ascension.

Christ's flesh in heaven is a guarantee that ours will be there too someday. Our hope is not an eternity as disembodied souls but real, resurrected, material human bodies in God's presence forever. Christ's body is the first one there, but not the last.

Join me in praise prayer to the Ascended Messiah the Lord Jesus in the lyrics of his hymn by James Dunn:

Lamb of God! Your Father's bosom
Ever was your dwelling place;
His delight, in Him rejoicing,
One with Him in power and grace;
Oh, that wondrous love and mercy—
You did lay your glory by,

And for us did come from Heaven,
As the Lamb of God, to die!

Lamb of God, you now are seated
high upon your Father's throne,
all your gracious work completed,
all your mighty victory won;
every knee in heaven is bending
to the Lamb for sinners slain;
all sing forth his praise unending-
'Worthy is the Lamb to reign!'

Lord, in all your power and glory,
still your thoughts and eyes are here,
watching over all your people,
to your gracious heart so dear;
you for them are interceding-
everlasting is your love-
and a holy rest preparing
in our Father's house above.

Lamb of God! Our souls adore Thee
While upon your face we gaze;
There the Father's love and glory
Shine in all their brightest rays;
Your almighty power and wisdom
All creation's works proclaim;
Heaven and earth alike confess Thee
As the ever great I AM.

This has been Wayne Conrad with Bible Insights.