
Lesson 60

The Ascension

The Scripture Lesson

Acts 1:1-11

We begin today our study of the book of the Bible called *Acts*. The complete title is *The Acts of the Apostles*. This book tells about how Jesus continued to work from heaven, *through the apostles*, to build His church. *Acts* tells us about the work (the *acts*) of the apostle John, and of the apostle Peter, and especially of the apostle Paul. But we must remember that it is *Christ Himself* who works in them, by His Holy Spirit.

The writer of *Acts* is a man by the name of Luke. He was the same man that God used to write the third of the four gospel accounts. In *Acts*, Luke continues where he left off in *The Gospel According to Luke*. He begins therefore with the ascension. Jesus, you will remember, had led His disciples out of the city of Jerusalem to the Mount of Olives. Here the eleven men who had been with Jesus for three years would see Him for the last time on this earth.

The disciples, however, did not yet know that Jesus would this day leave them. They did not yet understand either exactly what His kingdom would be like. So they asked Jesus, “Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?”

Jesus, we know, is very patient with His people. He was surely patient here with His disciples, who

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were so very slow to learn. He did not tell them that there would be no kingdom — for there surely *is* a kingdom, a *spiritual* kingdom, a kingdom in which He is King, and in which they will someday reign with Him. But He told them that it was not for them to know when that kingdom would come in all its glory. It is not for us to know either. We must only be faithful, day by day, in the work God gives us to do.

Jesus went on to tell them what their work was to be. The Holy Ghost, Jesus said, would give them power to be His witnesses, not only in Jerusalem and all Judea, but on into Samaria and to all the world.

After He said this, Jesus lifted His hands and blessed them. And then, lo and behold, Jesus began slowly to rise toward heaven. Their eyes must have been wide with amazement as He rose higher and higher, till a special cloud came down and received Him out of their sight. The disciples stood staring after that cloud, knowing that it carried their Master away, so that they would not see Him again on earth.

And as they stared, two angels suddenly appeared beside them. The angels assured them that Jesus had gone up into heaven. They need not stare after that cloud, for they had not *lost* their Master. His ascension would be for their *good*. And not only

that, the angels said, but He will someday come back, on the clouds of heaven, before the eyes of men, in all of His glory.

Jesus had not only ascended to heaven, but He was also seated at the right hand of God. Do you know what that means? It means that Jesus was given power to rule over all things. But He rules *under God*. God is still supreme. But He rules through the Man Christ Jesus. God gives to Christ (that is, to the Son of God in His *human nature*) the authority and the power and the wisdom to rule the entire universe. Men and angels, good people and bad, sickness and health, war and peace, life and death — all are subject to Christ, who loves us, who gave Himself for us, and now directs all things so that they work for our profit. Wonderful, blessed ascension!

The Appointment of Matthias

Acts 1:12-26; 2:1

Jesus had told His disciples that He would send His Holy Spirit in just a few days, and that they should wait in Jerusalem for that gift. The disciples did not know exactly *when* they would receive the Spirit. Nor did they know *how* they would receive Him, or exactly what difference He would make in their lives. But they knew from what Jesus said that it would be a very wonderful thing. So they stayed close together during those days, not wanting to miss out on anything that might happen.

They stayed together in the upper room of a house in the city. During the day they went to the temple, where they praised the Lord by telling others about Jesus' resurrection and ascension. At evening they would come back to the house. The Bible tells us that other people, who were also looking for the coming of the Spirit, joined them. Jesus' mother was there, and His brothers, and the women who had followed Him in Galilee. All these stayed together, waiting, praying often for the fulfillment of Jesus' promise.

While they were waiting, it occurred to the disciples that Jesus had appointed *twelve* apostles and that only *eleven* were left. They were sure that there must be twelve. Did not the Scriptures prophesy that the place of the traitor would be filled by another?

Jesus would certainly not let that place be empty. But Jesus was gone. It must be, therefore, that the *church* must make this appointment, in the name of Jesus.

So, one day when nearly all of the members of the church in Jerusalem were together, Peter stood up and explained the problem to them. He told them that the Old Testament had something to say about the place of Judas. He read to them two verses from the Psalms: "Let his habitation be desolate..." and "his bishopric (or office) let another take." Peter was right that this was spoken in prophecy about Judas, and that it meant that Judas' place must be taken by another. But when he argued that now the *church* must choose a replacement for Judas, he may have been jumping to conclusions. For Jesus could still appoint an apostle *Himself*. And He did; for He later appeared from heaven to Saul of Tarsus and made him an apostle.

But Peter did not know that yet. So he suggested to the people that they choose two men, two men who had been with Jesus during His ministry on earth and who had seen Him alive after His resurrection. And then, he said, we will cast lots between those two, because the Lord directs the lot and He alone knows which of the two men is best fitted to be an apostle. The final choice then will be the Lord's. So they did that. They chose Joseph and Matthias, and "they gave forth their lots; and the lot fell upon Matthias; and he was numbered among the apostles."

MEMORY WORK

Group A

Mark 16:19 "So then after the Lord had spoken unto them, he was received up into heaven, and sat on the right hand of God."

Group B

Mark 16:19b "He was received up into heaven, and sat on the right hand of God."

ACTIVITIES

This paper has been prepared in the hope that it will be used by students of all ages. The activities are designed so that the oldest will be challenged, and the youngest will find some of it within reach. Parents should encourage their children to attempt only what they can handle without frustration. For some that will be much, for others little.

DO YOU AGREE?

If you do, write Yes; if you do not, write No.

- ___ 1. The book of Acts was written by one of the apostles.
- ___ 2. At the time of the ascension the disciples showed that they still had not entirely given up their thinking that Jesus' kingdom would be somehow earthly.
- ___ 3. Jesus told them that their work in the kingdom was that they would be His witnesses.
- ___ 4. After Jesus spoke these parting words to His disciples He once more vanished suddenly from their sight.
- ___ 5. Two angels then appeared to the disciples and told them that Jesus was taken to heaven but that He would someday return.
- ___ 6. After the ascension, Jesus' disciples went back to their fishing while they waited for the fulfillment of the promise of the Spirit.
- ___ 7. The number of Jesus' followers who were waiting for the outpouring of the Spirit was about 120.
- ___ 8. During the time that they were waiting in Jerusalem, Peter stood up and explained to the rest of the 120 that it was necessary that they appoint another apostle in the place of Judas Iscariot.
- ___ 9. Peter said that David spoke in prophecy both of the removal of Judas and of his replacement by another.
- ___ 10. Peter then advised that a nomination be made by the apostles and that from it one be elected by the vote of the 120.
- ___ 11. The one who was numbered that day with the eleven apostles was a man by the name of Matthias.

QUESTIONS FOR YOUNGER READERS

1. Who wrote the book of *Acts*? What other book of the Bible did this man write?
2. From the complete title of this book of *Acts* can you tell already what the book will be about?
3. What question did the disciples have for Jesus when they stood with Him for the last time on the Mount of Olives?
4. What did Jesus tell them their work in Jesus' real kingdom would be?
5. Do you know when it was that the disciples finally understood exactly what Jesus meant in His instruction about the kingdom?
6. How did Jesus go away from His disciples at the end of this appearance on the Mount of Olives?
7. Why did Jesus send angels to talk to the disciples after His ascension?
8. Do you understand what it means that Jesus, when He ascended, "sat on the right hand of God"? And can you explain why it is that we should be happy about that?
9. After the ascension of Jesus, why did the disciples stay close together in Jerusalem? How did they keep busy while they waited?
10. According to Acts 1:15, how many followers of Jesus were waiting together for the fulfillment of His promise? What did they use for their meeting place in Jerusalem?
11. Why did Peter suggest that the selection of another apostle be made by the casting of lots? How did Jesus later show that, though He was in heaven, He could still personally appoint a twelfth apostle?

COMPLETING SENTENCES

1. *The Gospel According to Luke* was written by Luke to a man addressed as “most excellent _____.” Perhaps Theophilus was a Gentile converted to Christianity through the mission work of the early church. Luke wrote to him in order that he might know the _____ of the things in which he had already been _____ (Luke 1:3, 4). Luke was also the writer of *Acts*. In the first verse of this book Luke writes, “The _____ treatise have I made, O _____, of all that Jesus _____ both to do and teach.” By referring to the gospel account as the *beginning* of Jesus’ words and works, Luke evidently declares that *Acts* is an account of what Jesus *continued* to do, but now from heaven, by His Spirit, through the apostles.
2. Luke goes on to give the background of Pentecost by affirming the resurrection and then giving a short account of the ascension. Evidence of the resurrection, Luke says, was not limited to a single appearance, which might have left questions and doubts; but, rather, Jesus showed Himself _____ after His _____ by many _____ proofs, being seen by various individuals and groups over a period of no less than _____ days (Acts 1:3).
3. It was during those forty days, says Luke, that Jesus commanded His disciples not to depart from _____, but to _____ there for the _____ of the Father. For they would be baptized with the _____ not many _____ hence (Acts 1:4, 5).
4. The disciples rightly understood that the baptism with the Holy Spirit would be a wonderful thing. But, because they had not yet *received* the fullness of the Spirit, the disciples were still confused about how it would benefit them. So, hearing Jesus speak of this great gift, and of the power it would give them, the disciples asked, “Lord, wilt thou at _____ time (that is, at the time of the gift of the Spirit) _____ again the _____ to Israel” (Acts 1:6).
5. The disciples were still not clear on the *nature* of Jesus’ kingdom, the *extent* of His kingdom, and their own *work* in that kingdom. In answering them, Jesus told them, first of all, that it was not for them to know the _____ or the _____, which the Father has put in His own _____. Then He explained that when they received _____ after the Holy Ghost was given them, they would (not rule in an earthly kingdom but) be _____ unto Him, not only in Jerusalem and in all _____, but also in _____ and to the _____ part of the earth (Acts 1:7, 8).
6. When Jesus had _____ these things, while they _____, He was taken _____, and a _____ received Him out of their sight. Thus did the disciples actually *witness* His ascension, so they knew that He was now in heaven and would not again appear to them suddenly as He had a number of times during the 40 days after His resurrection (Acts 1:9).
7. While the disciples were looking _____ toward _____ as Jesus went up, two _____ (angels) suddenly stood by them, to confirm in their minds that Jesus had really ascended. “Ye men of Galilee,” the angels said, “why stand ye _____ up into heaven? This _____ Jesus, which is taken up from you into _____, shall so _____ in like manner as ye have seen him _____.” Personally, visibly, gloriously He will return (Acts 1:9, 10).
8. After witnessing the ascension the disciples returned at once to _____ from the mount called _____, which is from Jerusalem a _____ day’s journey. There they went into an _____ room, which served for the next ten days as a kind of headquarters for the eleven apostles, the women who were followers of Jesus, and _____ the mother of Jesus, and his _____ (Acts 1:12-14).
9. During that ten-day period it occurred to the apostles that, unless some action were taken soon, they would have to begin their apostolic work

shorthanded. They were convinced that Jesus had chosen 12 for good reason, and with the falling out of Judas they were left with only 11. Since Christ was now gone to heaven, it seemed to them that it was left for the church to act. Peter therefore, as spokesman for the eleven, stood up in the midst of the disciples (the number of whom was about _____) and said, "Men and _____, this _____ must needs have been fulfilled, which the Holy Ghost by the mouth of _____ spake before concerning _____, which was guide to them that took Jesus. For he was _____ with us, and had obtained part of this _____ For it is written in the book of _____, Let his _____ be _____, and let no man dwell therein; and his _____ (his office) let another take" (Acts 1:15-20).

10. The two passages of Scripture quoted by Peter refer first of all to the enemies of *David*. But, since David was a type of Christ, his experiences were prophetic of *Christ's* experiences. Peter therefore concluded that the two passages together speak of the removal of Judas from his office, and the filling of it by another. Wherefore, Peter continued, of these men who have _____ with us _____ the time that Jesus went in and out among us, must one be _____ to be a _____ with us of His _____ (Acts 1:21, 22).

11. Perhaps Peter also proposed the procedure for appointment, namely, that nomination be made by the church, and final selection be made by the casting of lots. On the basis of the qualifications for office suggested by Peter, two men were appointed: Joseph and _____. They then prayed, saying, Lord, who knowest the _____ of all men, show which of these two thou hast _____ (Acts 1:23, 24).

12. Through the lot, so it was thought, the replacement for Judas could be appointed by Christ Himself. So they gave forth their lots, and the lot fell on _____; and he was

_____ with the eleven _____ (Acts 1:26).

13. Leviticus 23 gives information about some of the Old Testament feasts. In verse 5 we learn that the fourteenth of the first month, at even, is the Lord's _____, at which time the passover lamb must be killed. On the sixteenth of that month, the priest would take of the firstfruits of the harvest and wave the _____ before the Lord (Lev. 23:10, 11). And in verses 15 and 16 we read that Israel was commanded to count, from the day that they brought the sheaf of the wave offering, _____ sabbaths complete; and on that fiftieth day (Pentecost) they were to bring out of their habitations two _____ loaves, the first fruits of their finished harvest, and present them to the Lord. These three activities of the Israelites were pictures of three important aspects of the work of the Messiah for which Israel looked. The killing of the Passover lamb pointed to the death of Jesus on the cross. The waving of the firstfruits of the harvest pictured the resurrection of Jesus. And the presenting of the wave loaves as the firstfruits of the finished harvest on Pentecost was a type of the outpouring of the Spirit.

The 14th of Nisan would not, of course, always fall on the same day of the week. On Passion Week (the week of Jesus' suffering and death) the 14th was on Thursday. The killing of the typical passover lamb, therefore, took place on Thursday, with the fulfillment, in Jesus' death, occurring on Friday. The waving of the firstfruits of the barley harvest was on Saturday, with the fulfillment, in Jesus' resurrection, occurring on Sunday. Pentecost was on Saturday, with the fulfillment, in the outpouring of the Spirit, occurring on Sunday. Thus do we read in Acts 2:1: "When the day of Pentecost was _____ come (therefore *past*), they (the 120) were all together in one place."

QUESTIONS TO THINK ABOUT

1. It has been said that Acts 1:1 divides the work of Christ into two great branches. Do you see how it does that?
2. Think again about the purpose of the book of Acts as it is implied in the first verse of the book. Given that

purpose, why would Luke begin by establishing the fact of the resurrection — that is, by assuring Theophilus that it was based on and supported by “many infallible proofs” (Acts 1:3)?

3. The old misconceptions of the disciples appeared again before the ascension from the Mount of Olives, when the disciples asked Jesus if He would at this time restore the kingdom to Israel. Can you show how their question showed a lack of understanding both of the nature and of the extent of Jesus’ kingdom?

4. Implied in the question of the disciples was also a misunderstanding of their work in the kingdom. How did Jesus’ answer clarify this matter for them?

5. How was it more helpful for the disciples that Jesus at this time ascended before their eyes, with a special cloud receiving him out of their sight ... rather than that He simply disappeared from among them on Mount Olivet?

6. The angels who appeared to the disciples at that point knew full well what had just happened there. Why then did they ask, “Why stand ye gazing up into heaven?”

7. Mark tells us that, when Jesus ascended, He “sat on the right hand of God” (Mark 16:19). Can you explain what that means?

8. Jesus is the Son of God, the Second Person of the Trinity. He could say to the Jews, “I and my Father are one” (John 10:30). How then can it be said that He sits at the right hand of God, if He Himself *is* God?

9. Omnipresence, omniscience, omnipotence — these are all attributes of God. Jesus told His disciples that, at His ascension, “all power is given unto me in heaven and in earth” (Matt. 28:18). What do you think — does that mean that Jesus, when He ascended, became omnipotent (that is, that He had absolute power and authority to rule as it pleased Him)?

10. The Bible does not tell us outright that the outpouring of the Spirit was ten days after the ascension. Can you explain how the number of days can be determined from what the Bible does tell us?

11. Acts 1:13-15 suggests that the 120 followers of Jesus stayed together during much of that ten-day period. They had not been *told* to stay together. Why would they *want* to do so?

12. Apparently the 120 disciples mentioned in Acts 1:15 included also the women of verse 14. Can you think of a reason why Peter, in raising the matter of a possible appointment of a replacement for Judas, would address this assembly as “*Men and brethren*,” rather than, say, “*Brothers and sisters*”?

13. Do you see how the words of Peter in Acts 1:16 assume the doctrine of the divine inspiration of the Scriptures — that is, that in the Bible, written by *men*, we have the words of *God*?

14. In Acts 1:20 Peter quoted from Psalm 69:25 and Psalm 109:8. If you read those Psalms you will notice that David was writing, in them, about *his own* enemies. How could Peter then refer those verses to *Judas*, an enemy of *Jesus*?

15. Of the two qualifications for apostleship proposed by Peter in Acts 1:21, 22, which one did the apostle Paul meet?

16. The Old Testament Feast of Pentecost marked the end of the harvest season. According to Leviticus 23:17, two loaves of bread were to be presented to the Lord as the firstfruits of the finished harvest. It is easy to see how this was an expression of the people’s thanksgiving to God for providing them with food for the year. But can you see also how the presenting of the two “wave loaves,” which represented the first *benefits* of the harvest, was also a picture of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit? The Old Testament Pentecost, in other words, pointed ahead to the New Testament Pentecost. How did it do that?

17. Read again number 13 in “Completing Sentences,” and then think about this: It was not mere *coincidence* that the death of Christ, the resurrection, and the outpouring of the Spirit occurred on the particular days that they did. God *ordered* it that way. Why, do you suppose, would He order those events such that they fell where they did in relation to the Old Testament ceremonies?