

Jesus' Ascension

Acts 1 v 1-11

Context:

As the glorious Easter season draws to a close, we turn to an event in the life of Jesus that often goes under the radar. The ascension of Jesus plays a critical role in the true Gospel story and has huge theological significance, but it doesn't really receive the attention or interest it deserves. So, in today's study we will explore what Luke has to tell us about this wonderful climax to the earthly ministry of Jesus.

Observation:

Note: Although the Book of Acts is anonymous, there is a strong and long-standing tradition that its author was Luke, who also wrote the third Gospel in the New Testament.

1. Who did Luke write this book for (v 1)?
2. How does Luke summarise the contents of his former book, the Gospel of Luke (v 1-2)?
3. What did Jesus do after his suffering (v 3a)?
4. For how long did he do this and what was the focus of his teaching at this time (v 3b)?
5. What command did Jesus give his disciples while he was eating with them (v 4-5)?
6. What question did they ask him in v 6?
7. What was Jesus' reply in v 7-8?
8. What happened next (v 9)?
9. What did the disciples do and who appeared in v 10?
10. What question did they ask the disciples and what promise did they make (v 11)?

Meaning:

Note: The recipient of Luke's Gospel and the Book of Acts, Theophilus, could have been an individual person or a church community. 'Theophilus' means 'God lover', which is an appropriate name for an individual follower of Jesus or a way of speaking about a whole church community – see also Luke 1 v 1-4.

1. In v 1 Luke says that in his first book (i.e. Luke's Gospel) he wrote about '*all that Jesus began to do and teach*'. What does the word '**began**' indicate about the content of this second volume, the Book of Acts?
2. Can you name some of the '*convincing proofs*' Luke is referring to in v 3a?
3. The number 40 carries spiritual significance in the Bible. What might be the significance of the 40 day period mentioned in v 3b?
4. The subject of Jesus' teaching in this 40 day period was 'the kingdom of God' (v3b). Based on Jesus' ministry and teaching in the Gospels, and his death and resurrection, what kind of things do you think Jesus would have taught them about the kingdom during those days?

5. Jesus says he had already spoken to them about the Father's gift, the Holy Spirit (v 4-5) – so based on what Jesus had previously told them in Luke 24 v 45-49, and his words in v 8, why was it imperative that they wait in Jerusalem?
6. What do you think was behind the disciples' question to Jesus in v 6 – what did they mean and what was their expectation?
7. Jesus' initial response is quite enigmatic (v 7) – what do you think he meant?
8. The disciples seemed to be focused on an Old Testament understanding of the kingdom – that it would be an earthly kingdom in which Israel rules over the nations with political and military power – but in v 3 Jesus spoke about the kingdom of *God*, not of *Israel*. So, how might the words of Jesus in v 8 realign the disciples concept of the kingdom based on a New Testament understanding?
9. In v 9 we read that Jesus was taken up from earth to heaven in or on a cloud. Read Daniel 7 v 13-14 – what does the way Jesus ascended indicate about his identity and purpose?
10. What do you think was the spiritual/theological significance of Jesus' ascension – why did he ascend to heaven rather than stay on earth? You may want to look at the following verses for some clues: John 14 v 1-3, John 14 v 12-14, John 16 v 6-7, Ephesians 2 v 4-7, Romans 8 v 33-34, Philippians 2 v 6-11, Hebrews 4 v 14-16, Hebrews 6 v 18-20a, Hebrews 7 v 22 – 8 v 2, Hebrews 9 v 24-28.
11. Jesus' ascension to heaven is not the end of his mission – see v 11. Why do you think Jesus will come again, what is the point of his promised return?

Application:

1. What does it mean to you to be baptised in/with/by the Holy Spirit (v 5) and what difference does it make to your daily life?
2. What practical difference does it make to you that Jesus has ascended to heaven – what would be lost if this event had never happened?
3. The disciples were told not to stand gazing into the sky, because Jesus would return in the future, and they had work to do in the meantime. How does Jesus want us to spend our time while we wait for him to come again?

Pray:

- Thank God for all the blessings and benefits of Jesus' ascension.
- Pray for a continual infilling of the Holy Spirit to empower our lives.
- Pray for God's grace to live your daily life faithfully until Jesus returns.