

THE ASCENSION OF JESUS

Mark 16:19-20; Luke 24:50-53; Acts 1:1-11; Hebrews 1:1-4

On Friday, April 7th, 30AD, Jesus was arrested, tried, condemned, tortured, crucified and buried. He was buried quickly, between 3PM and dusk before the dawn of the Sabbath at approximately 6PM. His body lay in the tomb the entire Sabbath. In the wee hours of the "first day of the week", Sunday, April 9th, 30AD, Jesus rose from the dead.

Jesus revealed Himself alive to His followers and remained in Jerusalem for over a week after Resurrection Sunday (Jn. 20:26). Then, He and the disciples returned to Galilee where Jesus continued to teach the disciples. After about a month, Jesus and the disciples returned to Bethany, an easy walk from Jerusalem on the east side of the Mount of Olives (Luke 24:50). Soon, Jerusalem would again be packed for the Feast of the Lord called *Pentecost*.

THE ASCENSION (ACTS 1:1-11)

As we discovered last week, this is actually Jesus' second ascension. He first ascended on resurrection morning to cleanse the heavenly tabernacle with His blood (Jn. 20:17-18; Heb. 9:11-14).

THE KINGDOM OF GOD (ACTS 1:3, 6)

Did you notice in verse 3 the subject about which Jesus spoke to His disciples during His 40 days with them? The kingdom of God. What is the kingdom of God? The kingdom of God is not heaven. The kingdom of God is the Messianic Kingdom. Notice the disciples' question in verse six (Acts 1:6).

Clearly, the disciples understood the kingdom of God to be the Messianic Kingdom which Jesus Himself will restore to the nation of Israel. Jeremiah 33:14-16 is representative of so many passages promising the Messianic Kingdom in the Hebrew Scriptures.

The fact that Jesus taught the disciples about the Messianic Kingdom even after being crucified by the Jews proves God has not rejected Israel, nor will He renege on the promises of His unconditional covenants to Israel.

The Messianic Kingdom will be restored to the nation of Israel. But Israel's rejection of Jesus on the Day of Rejection (Matt. 12-13) delayed the establishment of the Messianic Kingdom. That generation which rejected Jesus as their Messiah brought upon themselves God's divine judgment of 70AD; the Roman invasion and conquest of Israel. The Messianic Kingdom will come to a future generation of Jews who will recognize and receive Jesus of Nazareth as their Messiah (Isaiah 53; Matt. 23:37-39).

In Matthew 12 & 13, Jesus revealed that as a result of their rejection the coming of the Messianic Kingdom would be delayed and a *Mystery Form* of the Kingdom would be established. Through the nine parables recorded in Matthew 13, Jesus revealed characteristics of this Mystery Form of the Kingdom.

We are living in the Mystery Form of the Kingdom.

But even now God is working to fulfill the promises of the Messianic Kingdom. A huge step towards the coming of the Messianic Kingdom was the reestablishment of the nation of Israel in 1948. World Wars I & II fulfilled Jesus' prophecy of nation rising against nation and kingdom against kingdom before the end of the age (Matt. 24:7-8). The reestablishment of Israel was the long-term result of World Wars I & II. The reestablishment of Israel also fulfilled the prophecy of Ezekiel 20:33-38.

Jesus' ascension is hardly an ending; it was a transition to the next phase of His ministry even as He awaits the time of His second coming to establish His kingdom on earth.

Our futures are bound up in the Messianic Kingdom. Contrary to popular belief, we spend little time in heaven. We will serve Jesus in His kingdom and after that we will live on the new earth.

We need to live our lives in light of the Messianic Kingdom!

THE HOLY SPIRIT (ACTS 1:8)

In His final words to the disciples, Jesus instructed them to stay in Jerusalem until the promised Holy Spirit came upon them. As we studied previously, during the Upper Room Discourse, Jesus revealed that upon His departure, the Holy Spirit would come to indwell and empower them (Jn. 16:4-15). This prophecy was fulfilled ten days after Jesus' ascension on the Feast of Pentecost.

The coming of the Holy Spirit proved a great advantage for the disciples (Jn. 16:7). For example, having been indwelt by the Holy Spirit, Peter became fearless and preached a powerful message to several thousand Jews. Through Peter's preaching, the Holy Spirit brought conviction of sin, righteousness and judgment upon 3000 Jews who were saved that day.

For Jesus, the ascension was a transition that included handing off the work of the ministry to His followers while He Himself began a new ministry in heaven.

JESUS EXALTED (HEBREWS 1:1-4)

The book of Hebrews tells us what happened when Jesus arrived in heaven on His second ascension.

Jesus was exalted over all the angelic host though for a time He had been made lower than the angels in His humanity (Heb. 2:9). Now, as the Resurrected Savior, Jesus was exalted as the unique *Son of God* and seated at the place of highest honor, the right hand of God the Father.

With His ascension and exaltation Jesus began His ministry as High Priest by which He continues to minister to us (Heb. 5:1-10).

Far from being the end of Jesus' ministry, the ascension transitioned Jesus into further ministry aimed at advancing His kingdom in and through our lives (Rom. 8:31-39).