

The Body of Christ Ascends to Heaven (Acts 1:9-12)

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Today's passage (Acts 1:9-12)

Now when He had spoken these things, while they watched, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as He went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel, who also said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven. Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day's journey."¹

"Now when He had spoken these things . . ." (Acts 1:9)

1. What things?

A. Verse 4: The promise of the Father, being baptized with the Holy Spirit.

B. Verse 7: The delay of the restoration of the kingdom to Israel.

C. Verse 8: After Spirit baptism - being witnesses.

I. To Jews — in Jerusalem and in all Judea (begins in Acts 2).

II. To Samaritans — in Samaria (begins in Acts 8).

III. To Gentiles — to the end of the earth (begins in Acts 10 and beyond)

2. Previous session in Acts — Expectation of a Jewish Kingdom^b.

A. The OT and NT indicate their expectation is justified.

B. Timing not now: the Church Age, an age focusing on global evangelization of all nations, will intervene.

3. Previous session to that one — Waiting for the Promise of the Father^c.

A. A *new* ministry of the Spirit which never occurred prior to Acts 2 — baptism.

B. John the Baptist, and others, baptize with water. Only Jesus baptizes with the Spirit (Mat. 3:11; Mark 1:8; Luke 3:16; John 1:33).

I. “. . . He who sent me to baptize with water said to me, 'Upon whom you

see the Spirit descending, and remaining on Him, this is He who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.” (John 1:33)

II. “for John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.” (Acts 1:5)

C. Spirit baptism marks the creation of a new spiritual entity — the “body of Christ” (Rom. 6:3-4; 1Cor. 12:13; Gal. 3:27).

D. The “body of Christ” == the Church (1Cor. 12:27; Eph. 1:22-23; Col. 1:18).

“While they watched, He was taken up” (Acts 1:9)

1. Imagine what it must have been like to see!!

2. His last act before ascending appears to have been pronouncing a blessing over them.

A. “And He led them out as far as Bethany, and He lifted up His hands and blessed them. Now it came to pass, while He blessed them, that He was parted from them and carried up into heaven.” (Luke 24:50-51)

3. What mixed emotions: amazement and sadness with longing—their Lord was now *gone!*

4. The literal “body of Christ” ascends to heaven!

A. This begins a period, now over 1900 years and counting, during which Jesus remains absent from earth.

B. The period Jesus taught about in His parable of the nobleman in Luke 19. “A certain nobleman went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom and to return.” (Luke 19:12)

C. While the literal body of Christ remains absent, the Church—the *spiritual body of Christ*, formed by Spirit-baptism beginning on the Day of Pentecost—is the eyes, mouth, hands, and feet of Jesus.

D. Jesus prepared the disciples on the night of His betrayal.

“And I will pray *the Father*, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever— the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you. *I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you.*” (John 14:16-18)

“But *now I go away to Him who sent Me*, and none of you asks Me, ‘Where are You going?’ But because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your heart.

Nevertheless I tell you the truth. It is to your advantage that I go away; for *if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him to you.*" (John 16:5-7)

5. The Need of His Departure

A. Preconditions for sending the Spirit now met.

- I. ". . . the Holy Spirit was not yet given, *because Jesus was not yet glorified.*" (John 7:39)
- II. ". . . *if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him to you.*" (John 16:7)

B. Why these preconditions^d before the Spirit can be sent?

- I. The departure and glorification of Jesus provided for the cleansing of a new temple which would be permanently indwelt by the presence of God.
- II. Recall in the OT, how the manifest glory of God dwelt in Solomon's temple but was forced to depart because of the sin of Israel
 - a. '. . . Son of man, do you see what they are doing, the great abominations that the house of Israel commits here, *to make Me go far away from My sanctuary? . . .*' (Ezekiel 8:6)
- III. Soon, God would take up *permanent residence* within a new temple: a temple made of sinful flesh — the Church!
 - a. Flee sexual immorality. Every sin that a man does is outside the body, but he who commits sexual immorality sins against his own body. Or do you [plural] not know that your [plural] body [singular] is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? (1 Corinthians 6:18-19)
 - b. Once a person is baptized by the Spirit and joined to the body of Christ, their sinful flesh is permanently indwelt with the perfect, sinless Spirit of our Holy God!!!
 - i. Unlike Ezekiel's day when the glory of God was forced to depart the temple due to the sin of the people, the Spirit remains within the sinful flesh of those who are joined to Christ *and never departs.*
 - ii. "In Him you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were *sealed* with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is the *guarantee* of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory." (Ephesians 1:13-14)

- iii. “And do not *grieve* the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed *for the day of redemption.*” (Ephesians [4:30](#))

C. The departure of Jesus was required in order that the Spirit of a Holy God could permanently reside within a new temple made of *sinful* flesh.

The Angelic Ministry

1. **While they stood in amazement looking upward, their thoughts were interrupted by the words of two strangers dressed in white.**
2. **Perhaps these are the same two angels who comforted Mary as she wept at the empty tomb (John [20:12-13](#))?**
3. **The situation must have been similar: one of fear, uncertainty, and sorrow.**
 - Having found Jesus’ tomb empty, the disciples return to their homes, no doubt in fear and doubt.
 - “But Mary stood outside by the tomb *weeping*, [pause] and as she wept she stooped down and looked into the tomb. And she saw two angels in white sitting, one at the head and the other at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain. Then they said to her, ‘Woman, why are you weeping?’ She said to them, ‘Because they have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid Him.’ (John [20:10-13](#))

Now, the disciples faced a similar situation. The victorious Lord Whom had shown Himself to be victor over death—the One Whom they loved and had left all to follow—had now *departed!*

How were they to cope in His absence? It looked for all the world as if He *had* left them orphans!

- Here we see the truth of Hebrews [1:14](#) demonstrated, “Are they not all ministering spirits sent forth to minister for those who will inherit salvation?”

The angels provide of comfort, explanation, and encouragement.

A. “This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, *will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven.*” (Acts [1:11b](#))

B. He will come again!

- “And He led them out as far as Bethany, and He lifted up His hands and blessed them. Now it came to pass, while He blessed them, that He was parted from them and carried up into heaven. And they worshiped Him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and were continually in the temple praising and blessing God. Amen. (Luke [24:50–53](#))
 - They were encouraged! Luke records that following his ascension, “. . . they worshiped Him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy . . .” (Luke [24:52](#))

Taken up

1. Word is from **ἐπαίρο** [*epairo*], “to raise or lift up.”
2. Used to describe *hoisting* the mainsail of a ship (Acts **27:40**).
3. This event would be remembered in the twelfth chapter of Revelation, given years later to the Apostle John.
 - A. “[The woman] bore a male Child who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron. And her Child was *caught up* to God and His throne.” (Revelation **12:5**)
 - B. The passage in Revelation **12** uses a related Greek word from **ἀρπάζω** [*harpazō*], “to snatch, seize, be caught away” and is used to describe how the Lord caught Philip away from the Ethiopian Eunuch in Acts **8:39**.
 - C. The way in which Jesus was taken prefigures a similar experience the Church will one day have at the Rapture.
 - D. “Then we who are alive and remain shall be *caught up* together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord.” (1 Thessalonians **4:17**)
 - Archaeological testimony of His ascension

[an] ossuary from the Mount of Olives dated to A.D. 43 contains an inscription to Jesus who ascended. This ossuary, reported to be deep in storage within the Rockefeller Museum, was first reported by Eleazar Sukenik, late professor at the Hebrew University and father of the famous archaeologist Yigael Yadin. Its significance lies not only in being the earliest testimony to Jesus, but possibly the eye-witness testimony of one who saw Jesus ascend to heaven from the Mount of Olives (Mark **16:19**; Luke **24:50**; Acts **1:9-12**; 1Cor. **15:6**).²

Taken where?

1. Mark tells us, “. . . after the Lord had spoken to them, *He was received up into heaven, and sat down at the right hand of God*” (Mark **16:19**)
2. The three roles of Jesus: prophet (1st coming), priest (present session, seated to the right hand of the Father), and king (2nd coming).
 - A. At His first coming, He primarily fulfilled His role as a prophet. (He was and always will be King, but was rejected as King.)
 - B. At His ascension, the emphasis shifts to His role as priest in relation to His redeeming sacrifice.

- “The LORD has sworn And will not relent, ‘You are a priest forever According to the order of Melchizedek.’” (Psalm [110:4](#))
- “Now this is the main point of the things we are saying: We have such a High Priest, who is *seated at the right hand* of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens, a Minister of the sanctuary and of the true tabernacle which the Lord erected, and not man.” (Hebrews [8:1–2](#))
- “Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption.” (Hebrews [9:12](#))

“But this Man, *after He had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down at the right hand of God, from that time waiting till His enemies are made His footstool. For by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified.*” (Hebrews [10:12–14](#))

One of the benefits of Christ’s offering: it provided the atoning means for the Holy Spirit to come in His new baptizing and sealing ministry in relation to sinful flesh.

How long will He sit at the Father’s right hand?

- A. “The LORD said to my Lord, ‘Sit at My right hand, *Till I make Your enemies Your footstool.*’” (Psalm [110:1](#))
- B. Jesus sits until the time is ripe for God’s judgment—the age of grace comes to a close—and God directly intervenes to judge a rejecting world.
- C. Zechariah prophesied concerning the battle associated with His return.
 - I. ***For I will gather all the nations to battle against Jerusalem; The city shall be taken, The houses rifled, And the women ravished. Half of the city shall go into captivity, But the remnant of the people shall not be cut off from the city. Then the LORD will go forth And fight against those nations, As He fights in the day of battle. And in that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, Which faces Jerusalem on the east. And the Mount of Olives shall be split in two, From east to west, Making a very large valley; Half of the mountain shall move toward the north And half of it toward the south. Then you shall flee through My mountain valley, For the mountain valley shall reach to Azal. Yes, you shall flee As you fled from the earthquake In the days of Uzziah king of Judah. Thus the LORD my God will come, And all the saints with You.*** (Zechariah [14:2–5](#))
- D. After the rise of Antichrist and his nefarious opposition to God’s own.
 - I. “I was watching; and the same horn was making war against the saints, and prevailing against them, until the Ancient of Days came, and a judgment was made in favor of the saints of the Most High, and the time came for the saints to possess the kingdom.” (Daniel [7:21-22](#))

Will so come *in like manner*

1. **Manner is from *τρόπος* [*tropos*], “fashion,” “way.”**
 - A. “In just the same way” (NASB)
2. **His return will be: personal, bodily, visible, glorious**
3. ***Visible* - not something that will be secretive. This provides great protection!**
 - A. “Then if anyone says to you, 'Look, here is the Christ!' or 'There!' do not believe it. For *false christs and false prophets will rise* and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect. See, I have told you beforehand. Therefore if they say to you, 'Look, He is in the desert!' do not go out; or 'Look, He is in the inner rooms!' do not believe it. For as the lightning comes from the east and flashes to the west, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be.” (Matthew [24:23-27](#))
 - B. “Behold, He is coming with clouds, and *every eye will see Him*, even they who pierced Him. And all the tribes of the earth will mourn because of Him. Even so, Amen.” (Revelation [1:7](#))
4. ***Glorious* - with clouds**
 - Jesus said to [the high priest], “It is as you said. Nevertheless, I say to you, hereafter you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power, and *coming on the clouds of heaven*.” (Matthew [26:64](#))

“Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man *coming on the clouds of heaven* with power and great glory.” (Matthew [24:29-30](#))

Why the connection with clouds?

- I. **Manifestation of God as cloud by day, fire by night.**³
- II. **His manifest glory, but wrapped in a dark cloud.**⁴
- III. **God’s manifestation combines great power with mystery.**
- IV. **Ezekiel saw the glory of the Lord.**
 - a. “Then I looked, and behold, a whirlwind was coming out of the north, a great *cloud with raging fire* engulfing itself; and brightness was all around it and radiating out of its midst like the color of amber, out of the midst of the fire.” (Ezekiel [1:4](#))

- V. The cloud appears to function somewhat like a veil to hide the full glory of God, which if fully manifested, would consume everything in His presence.

The glory of Jesus

- I. “For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily;” (Colossians 2:9)
- II. “God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds; *who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person*, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high,” (Hebrews 1:1-3)
- III. Paul wrote to Timothy, “. . . great is the mystery of godliness: *God was manifested in the flesh, Justified in the Spirit, Seen by angels, Preached among the Gentiles, Believed on in the world, Received up in glory.*” (1 Timothy 3:16)
 - a. Paul knew first-hand of the glory of Christ having been blinded by it on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:3-6).
 1. He went on to urge Timothy to, “keep this commandment without spot, blameless until our Lord Jesus Christ’s appearing, which He will manifest in His own time, He who is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone has immortality, *dwelling in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see*, to whom be honor and everlasting power. Amen.” (1 Timothy 6:14-16)
 - b. “After His ascension into heaven, Christ never appeared again apart from His glory. In Acts 7:56, Stephen saw Christ standing at the right hand of the Father in the midst of the glory of God. In the appearance of Christ to Paul recorded in Acts 9:3-6, the glory of Christ was such that Paul was blinded. A similar experience befell the Apostle John in Rev. 1:12-20 where John fell at the feet of Christ as one dead when he beheld the glory of Christ in His resurrection.”⁵

The Mt. of Transfiguration - a sneak preview of Jesus’ glory upon His return.

- I. “‘Assuredly, I say to you, there are some standing here who shall not taste death till they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom.’ Now after six days Jesus took Peter, James, and John his brother, led them up on a high mountain by themselves; and He was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and His clothes became as white as the light.” (Matthew 16:28-17:1-2)
- II. Thus, His innate glory, which was veiled in the incarnation, will one day be seen for what it is—the very glory of God (John 1:14)!

Summary

1. For those of us who know Jesus . . .

A. Are we faithfully representing Christ during His absence?

- I. Are we diligently about the “Father’s business” (Luke [2:49](#); [19:13](#))?
- II. Do the actions of our eyes, mouth, hands, and feet and the thoughts of our heart reflect those of Jesus?
- III. Are we growing in our understanding of Who and What we have inside of us? That our bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit? That the Spirit of Christ is in *us*, the hope of glory (Col. [1:27](#))? That the very holiness of a perfect, all-powerful God of consuming fire resides within our fallen and weak tent?
- IV. Illustration: “In St. Peter’s Cathedral in Cologne, Germany there are two pictures of the crucifixion of Peter, that stand side by side. . . . In the beginning of the 19th century, when Napoleon came and ransacked the city, he robbed St. Peter’s of one of those two pictures—the original—and took it away. While the first picture was taken away from the city, the artist, in the absence of the original, painted another picture. In time the original was restored, and the two were placed side by side. Experts now say that there is so little difference between the two pictures you cannot tell which is the original. In the absence of the original, the artist painted another picture of Peter.”⁶
- V. This is how it should be with us. Jesus is the original Who has departed. In His absence, God has seen fit to send His Spirit to form the Church which is the body of Christ in His absence.

2. If you don’t know Jesus . . .

- A. *This* is the age of grace: *now* is the day of salvation (2Cor. [6:2](#)).
- B. The time is soon approaching when God’s wrath and judgment will begin to be poured out on a God-rejecting world.
- C. What will be my reaction when I see Him return? Will I be among those who experience great excitement and happiness? Or will I be filled with fear, remorse, and grief?

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Endnotes:

1. [NKJV](#), Acts 1:9-12
2. [Ref-0051](#), November/December 2002
3. Ex. [13:21](#); [14:24](#); [40:38](#); Lev. [16:13](#); Nu. [9:15](#); [14:14](#); Deu. [1:33](#); [4:11](#); [5:22](#); Ne. [9:12,19](#); Ps. [18:12](#); [78:14](#); [105:39](#); [148:8](#); Isa. [4:5](#); Eze. [1:4](#); Rev. [10:1](#).
4. The cloud also provided covering from the sun in the desert (Ps. [105:39](#); cf. Isa. [4:6](#)).
5. [Ref-0104](#), pp. 204-205
6. [Ref-1332](#), p. 293

Sources:

- NKJV** Unless indicated otherwise, all Scripture references are from the *New King James Version*, copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.
- Ref-0051** Randall Price, *World of the Bible News and Views*, [www.WorldOfTheBible.com].
- Ref-0104** John Walvoord, *Jesus Christ Our Lord* (Chicago, IL: Moody Bible Institute, 1969).
- Ref-1332** Walter B. Knight, *Knight's Master Book of New Illustrations* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1956). ISBN:0-80281699-1^f.

Links Mentioned Above

- a** - See <http://www.spiritandtruth.org/id/tg.htm>.
- b** - See <http://www.spiritandtruth.org/teaching/39-03>.
- c** - See <http://www.spiritandtruth.org/teaching/39-02.htm>.
- d** - See <http://www.spiritandtruth.org/teaching/10-13.htm>.
- e** - See <http://www.spiritandtruth.org>.
- f** - See <http://www.spiritandtruth.org/id/isbn.htm?0-80281699-1>.