

JESUS' LAST APPEARANCE: THE ASCENSION LUKE 24:50–53

Introduction

Luke closes his gospel with the ascension of Christ and begins Acts with the ascension of Christ (Acts 1:9-11). The ascension closes the Lord's earthly ministry, His mission to save the world. Therefore, the ascension can be said to be the final chapter, the close, the consummation of His journey upon earth. On the other hand, the ascension opens the Lord's heavenly ministry. His mission of intercession for the world and His mission of bearing witness through the lives of believers. Therefore, the ascension can be said to be the first chapter, the opening, the beginning of His journey into heaven as the Risen Lord. In heaven, Jesus Christ is the risen Lord who is the propitiation "for the sins of the whole world" (1 Jn. 2:1-2).

- I. The purpose of the ascension (vv. 50-51).
- II. The disciples' response to the ascension (vv. 52-53).

LUKE 24:50–53 ASCENSION OF JESUS CHRIST

The Lord ascended to the right hand of God, that is, to the position of sovereignty and power (see Mk. 16:19; Lk. 22:69; Acts 1:9-11; 2:36; 5:31; Eph. 1:20; Phil. 2:9-11; Rev. 5:12). The ascension assures (proves, confirms) that seven things are absolutely certain.

1. The ascension assures that God *is*, that He is alive and does exist. The fact that Christ was raised up from the dead and "taken up into heaven" (Lk. 24:51) proves that God is. Only God could do such a thing (1 Cor. 6:14; 2 Cor. 4:14; see Jn. 3:16. See Acts 2:24, 32; 3:15, 26; 4:14; 5:30; 10:40; 13:30, 33-34; 17:31.)
 2. The ascension assures that Christ is God's Son. The very fact that God raised up Christ and "was taken [Him] up into heaven" proves that Christ is God's Son (Mk. 16:19; Rom. 1:3-4; Phil. 2:5-11).
 3. The ascension assures that heaven is real (Phil. 3:20-31).
 4. The ascension assures that the gospel is true. When God raised up Christ and received Him into heaven, God validated the message of Christ. What Christ proclaimed and revealed was true: man faces a critical problem, the problem of sin and death and a future of condemnation and separation from God. However, man can be saved by the cross of Christ (Mk. 16:16; 1 Pet. 2:24).
 5. The ascension assures that the Great Commission is the call and mission of believers. Two things show this. First, Christ has ascended into heaven; therefore, He is gone, no longer on earth. If the gospel is to be carried to the ends of the earth,
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believers have to do it. They are the ones left on earth to do it. Second, it is the risen and ascended Lord who gave the Great Commission. *As the ascended Lord, He demands that His commission be fulfilled (Mk. 16:15; see Mt. 28:19-20).*

6. The ascension assures that power is available to carry out the Great Commission (Mt. 28:18; see Mk. 16:20).
7. The ascension assures that we have a very special Helper in heaven, One who really loves and cares for us. He is One who is sympathetic with “our weaknesses... tempted in every way, just as we are — yet was without sin” (Heb. 4:15). Therefore, He is ever ready to forgive and to look after us through all of life. □

I. *Luke 24:50–51 Purpose of the Ascension of Jesus Christ*

The purpose of the ascension. Two general purposes are given by Luke (See *Ascension of Jesus Christ*, Acts 1:9).

1. The first general purpose of the ascension was to bless the disciples. This was His final blessing, and note: it was the last thing He did on earth. His last gesture and act was to bless His disciples. This showed several things.
 - a. It showed that He was the High Priest who had the power to make the sin-offering for them and to bless them with the gift of peace with God.

Lev 9:22 Then Aaron lifted his hands toward the people and blessed them. And having sacrificed the sin offering, the burnt offering and the fellowship offering, he stepped down.

- b. It showed that His blessing was the blessing coming from the ascended Lord who was *in heaven* exalted to the right hand of God.

Eph 1:19-21 And his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of his mighty strength, which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come.

Eph 3:20 Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us.

- c. It showed that His blessing was forever, without end, even to the end of the world.

Mat 28:20 “And teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

- d. It showed that His blessing was unlimited, from their ascended and *eternal Lord*.

Col 1:17 He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.

Rev 22:13 “*I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End.*”

- e. It showed that His blessing was upon them as they went forth as His representatives, witnessing for Him.

Mat 28:19-20 “*Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.*”

2. The second general purpose of the ascension was to provide a witness and give great assurance (See *Ascension of Jesus Christ*, Lk. 24:50-53).

ACTS 01:09 ASCENSION OF JESUS CHRIST

After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight. Acts 1:09

Jesus' ascended before the disciples' very eyes. Note Jesus' last words on earth (Acts 1:8). His concern was reaching the world for God. Now note what happened.

Immediately after speaking the words, the most dramatic event began to happen. Jesus Christ began to slowly arise from the earth, ascending ever upward toward the sky above. The disciples were shocked and spellbound, gazing at the spectacular sight. They were beholding one of the most dramatic and phenomenal events ever experienced:

=> the Ascension of the Lord Jesus Christ.

=> the return of God's Son into heaven, into the spiritual world and dimension of being.

Note the words *before their very eyes* (v. 9, bleponton) and *they were looking intently* (atenizontes esan). The Lord ascended somewhat slowly in a dramatic, spectacular fashion. Why depart in this way? For the sake of the disciples. There are several significant reasons why they needed such a dramatic departure. (See *Jesus Christ, Exaltation*, Acts 2:33-36.)

1. Christ needed to dramatize and enforce His final departure. Since His resurrection He had been appearing and disappearing spontaneously, at will, as though by thought or light. This departure was to be final. He would never return again, not as He had been doing. Therefore this departure needed to be different; it needed to be impressed and enforced in the minds and consciences of the disciples once and for all.
2. Christ needed to dramatize and enforce His claim upon the disciples. This was the last time He would have to confirm His claims while on earth. He wanted the disciples to have additional confirmation, a most dramatic confirmation that He

was exactly whom He claimed to be. By actually ascending upward He was proclaiming seven glorious truths beyond all question.

- a. He is the ascended Lord. (Acts 2:36.)
- b. He is the ascended Mediator between God and man. (Jn. 10:7-8; 12:44-46; 14:6; 14:13-14; 1 Tim. 2:3-7. See Heb. 8:6; 9:15; 12:24.)
- c. He is the ascended Advocate of man before God. (The word *advocate* [parakleton] is the very same word used for the Holy Spirit, the Comforter [parakletos]. (See Jn. 14:16; Jn. 14:26; Jn. 15:26; Jn. 16:7.)

=> The Holy Spirit is God's Advocate on earth with men.

=> Jesus Christ is man's Advocate with God. (1 Jn. 2:1-2.)

- d. He is the ascended Son of God, the One who came "out of" heaven to earth to save man (Jn. 3:31; 3:32-34; 6:33; 7:25-31; 8:23; Heb. 7:25).
 - e. He is the ascended High Priest of God who makes reconciliation for the sins of men (Heb. 2:17-18. See 1 Jn. 2:1-2.)
 - f. He is the ascended High Priest who is touched with the feelings of our infirmities and delivers and succors us through all trials (Heb. 2:15-16. See Rom. 8:31-39; Heb. 2:17-18.)
 - g. He is the ascended Christ (Messiah) who makes intercession for us (Rom. 8:34; see 8:31-39).
3. Christ needed to dramatize and enforce His return to earth, that it shall take place exactly as He said. (Acts. 1:10-11.)
 4. Christ needed to dramatize and enforce that the disciples were not to be standing around "looking intently up into the sky." They were to get to the business at hand. They were to return to the upper room and...

- "wait" and pray for the presence and power of the Holy Spirit.
- move out witnessing to a world lost and reeling in desperate need.

Mark 16:19 *After the Lord Jesus had spoken to them, he was taken up into heaven and he sat at the right hand of God.*

Luke 24:51 *While he was blessing them, he left them and was taken up into heaven.*

Acts 1:9 *After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight.*

Heb 4:14 *Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess.*

Heb 9:24 *For Christ did not enter a man-made sanctuary that was only a copy of the true one; he entered heaven itself, now to appear for us in God's presence.*

1 Pet 3:22 *Who has gone into heaven and is at God's right hand — with angels, authorities and powers in submission to him. □*

ACTS 02:33–36 JESUS CHRIST, EXALTATION

Exalted to the right hand of God, he has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear. For David did not ascend to heaven, and yet he said, 'The Lord said to my Lord: "Sit at my right hand until I make our enemies a footstool for your feet. Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ."' Acts 02:33-36

The Exaltation and the Ascension of Jesus. Note three points.

1. Jesus was raised to be exalted. His resurrection involved the exaltation.

=> To be raised is for the purpose of exaltation.

=> To be raised is being exalted to the very presence of God.

=> To be raised and given eternal life is a state of exaltation.

=> To be raised means to be exalted.

Note the words “the right hand of God.” This is a position by the side of God, a place of honour, glory, authority, dominion, and rule (see Acts 5:31). Christ has been raised to sit by the right hand of God in such a position.

And note: Christ, who is the obedient Son of God and the exalted Lord, has received what God had promised Him, the Holy Spirit. The exalted Christ has the presence of God, the Holy Spirit, to *pour out* (execheen) upon us all. This is what “you now see and hear,” the glorious presence and energy of the Holy Spirit, of the very Spirit and presence of God Himself. (See Jn. 15:26; 16:7.)

Thought 1. The believer's heart should shout “hallelujah, praise the Lord.” Christ has sent the great promise and gift of the Spirit!

2. David prophesied the Lord's exaltation (see Psa. 110:1). David could not have been speaking of himself, for he never arose from the dead, nor has he ever been exalted. David was prophesying that God (Jehovah) had spoken to *David's Lord* (Messiah), promising that the Lord would sit on God's right hand. And the Lord

would reign until God subjected all the Lord's foes. The picture of the footstool is that of complete triumph and victory over all the enemies of Christ, both human and spiritual.

3. Peter declared emphatically: Jesus is both Lord and Messiah. "Let all...be assured" (asphalos). The word is emphatic. It means without any doubt whatsoever, with perfect assurance and certainty, be assured that...
 - Jesus is Lord (v. 33).
 - Jesus is Messiah (Mt. 1:18).
 - Jesus whom you crucified (Acts 2:23). □

II. *Luke 24:52–53 Response to the Ascension*

The disciples' response to the ascension was threefold.

1. The disciples worshipped Christ. The ascension stirred worship. Why? The disciples now knew beyond question that He was the true Messiah, the Son of God Himself. He had ascended to the right hand of God; therefore, He was due all the homage, adoration, and praise due God.

John 14:8-11 Philip said, "Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us." Jesus answered: "Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'? Don't you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? The words I say to you are not just my own. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work. Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe on the evidence of the miracles themselves."

Phil 2:8-11 And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death – even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

2. The disciples were filled with joy.
 - a. They were filled with joy because their Lord was now exalted and privileged to take His rightful place: sitting at the right hand of God and being worshipped eternally. They were filled with joy and rejoicing *for Him*.
 - b. They were filled with joy because they now knew that His presence would always be with them. When on earth physically, He could only be in one place and with only a few people at a time. But now, since ascending He could send His Spirit to dwell with believers everywhere (Omnipresent). Nothing would ever again be able to *separate* their Lord from them.

John 16:7 *“But I tell you the truth: It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Counsellor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you.”*

Rom 8:35, 38-39 *Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

3. The disciples were in the temple continually. The temple was the focus of God's presence and worship, and it was the centre of teaching, the place where the people were instructed in the Scriptures. The disciples were bound to focus their lives in the temple or church...

- because Christ had taught that the temple was His “Father's house” and “the house of prayer.”

Luke 19:46 *“It is written,” he said to them, “‘My house will be a house of prayer’; but you have made it ‘a den of robbers.’”*

John 2:16 *To those who sold doves he said, “Get these out of here! How dare you turn my Father's house into a market!”*

- because they wished to praise God for sending the Messiah and to bear public testimony of Him.
- because the temple was the chosen place of God to manifest His presence among His people.

Scripture is saying, “you [all the Corinthian believers] are the temple and sanctuary of God in whom the Spirit of God dwells.” (1 Cor. 3:16). The stress is upon the presence of God: His very presence *dwells within* the sanctuary, within the shrine proper. The point is powerful: God dwells among all the believers of the church. The Spirit of God lives in, dwells within the church — in a very, very special sense — no matter where they meet. The church itself, the body of believers, is the sanctuary for God's presence. (See Jn. 14:20; 20:22; 1 Cor.6:19; Eph.3:6; Col. 1:26-27.)

Mat 21:12-13 *Jesus entered the temple area and drove out all who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves. “It is written,” he said to them, “‘My house will be called a house of prayer,’ but you are making it a ‘den of robbers.’”*

Acts 5:20 *“Go, stand in the temple courts,” he said, “and tell the people the full message of this new life.”*

Heb 10:25 *Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another — and all the more as you see the Day approaching. ■*