

The Ascension And Return

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

Why was Jesus Christ taken up in this way?

Acts 1:10-12 [NIV] “They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. ‘Men of Galilee,’ they said, ‘why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven.’ Then they returned to Jerusalem from the hill called the Mount of Olives, a Sabbath day’s walk from the city.”

As they were looking up at the ascent their attention was brought back to earth by two angels, appearing to them as men.

This passage of scripture makes two basic points, both are important to our Christian faith, both being included in the Apostles’ Creed.

First – Jesus Christ in physical form ascended up into the clouds and was lost to sight.

Second – the disciples were told that Jesus Christ would return to earth in the same way as He had ascended.

I believe that this second point is the reason that Jesus Christ ascended in a visible human form, to emphasise that He will return in a visible way.

It would have been easy for Jesus to simply tell His disciples that He was going to His Father, and that He would come back and then simply disappear as He had done on other occasions since His death and resurrection.

By visibly going up into the air, Jesus made it clear that He was **not** just disappearing. He was going to be at the Father’s right hand to intercede for us as our eternal High Priest, [**Hebrews 8:1-6**].

1 Timothy 2:5-6 [NIV] “For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all men, the testimony given in its proper time.”

Note Jesus Christ is our “man” in heaven.

Hebrews 4:14-16 [NIV] “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. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathise with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are, yet was without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.”

We have someone in heaven who understands exactly what it is like to be human, because Jesus is human as well as God.

This leads to the question, how can Jesus Christ who is God omnipresent, **not** limited to space and matter, also have a body that is localised in a particular place?

I don’t know.

Nor do I know how Jesus appeared behind locked doors, [**John 20:19**].

I do **not** know how Jesus could ascend into the air, contrary to the law of gravity.

Apparently the laws of physics do **not** apply to the body of Jesus Christ. It's still a body, but it doesn't have limitations that we consider are part of our having a body.

This still doesn't answer the question of where the body of Jesus Christ is right now.

What is important is that He is in heaven at the right hand of God the Father.

It is even more important for us to know about the spiritual body of Jesus Christ, the way He is living right now in the Church by the means of the Holy Spirit.

John 14:15-18 [NIV] *“If you love me, you will obey what I command. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counsellor to be with you for ever, the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.”*

Note the words *“I will come to you,”* Jesus Christ making this promise.

When Jesus Christ ascended bodily into heaven, He was giving us a visible sign that He continues to be human as well as divine.

Jesus Christ our Saviour now has the added ministry of High Priest, [**Hebrews 4:14-16**], Mediator, [**1 Timothy 2:5**], Head of the Church, [**Colossians 1:18; Ephesians 1:22; Ephesians 4:15-16**], our friend, [**John 15:14-17**], and Shepherd, [**John 10:11-16**].

I see another reason why Jesus Christ went up to heaven is a visible and physical way.

John 16:5-7 [NIV] *“Now I am going to him who sent me, yet none of you asks me, ‘Where are you going?’ Because I have said these things, you are filled with grief. 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.”*

It is *“for your good,”* apparently Jesus Christ had to go to heaven before the Day of Pentecost could happen with the dramatic arrival of the Holy Spirit.

John 16:8-11 [NIV] *“When he comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment: in regard to sin, because men do not believe in me; in regard to righteousness, because I am going to the Father, where you can see me no longer; and in regard to judgment, because the prince of this world now stands condemned.”*

Only then could the essential work of the Holy Spirit on earth begin.

There is **no** sadness involved in the way that the departure of Jesus Christ is recorded in Acts, only an anticipation of the even greater things happening in and through all of those who have faith in Jesus Christ our Saviour and Lord.

John 14:12-14 [NIV] *“I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father. And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father. You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it.”*

The disciples remembered this promise and in an excited buzz of activity among the 120 disciples they prepared for the job of work that Jesus Christ had left them to do, [**Matthew 28:18-20**].

They selected another apostle to replace Judas, knowing that there had to be 12 people representing the new Israel that God was forming, [**Matthew 20:28**].

They just needed to wait in Jerusalem, as Jesus had told them, until they were filled with power from on high, the promised comforter or Holy Spirit, [**Acts 1:4-5, 12-14**].

Jesus Christ has already returned to earth in a spiritual form through the presence of the Holy Spirit in each believer.

Matthew 24:26-27, 29-30 [NIV] *“So if anyone tells you, ‘There he is, out in the desert,’ do not go out; or, ‘Here he is, in the inner rooms,’ do not believe it. For as lightning that comes from the east is visible even in the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. Wherever there is a carcass, there the vultures will gather. Immediately after the distress of those days ‘the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken.’ At that time the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and all the nations of the earth will mourn. They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory.”*

Jesus makes it very clear that His Second Coming will not be in secret but a very visible thing.

Zechariah 14:4-9 [NIV] *“On that day his feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, east of Jerusalem, and the Mount of Olives will be split in two from east to west, forming a great valley, with half of the mountain moving north and half moving south. You will flee by my mountain valley, for it will extend to Azel. You will flee as you fled from the earthquake in the days of Uzziah king of Judah. Then the LORD my God will come, and all the holy ones with him. On that day there will be no light, no cold or frost. It will be a unique day, without daytime or night-time, a day known to the LORD. When evening comes, there will be light. On that day living water will flow out from Jerusalem, half to the eastern sea and half to the western sea, in summer and in winter. The LORD will be king over the whole earth. On that day there will be one LORD, and his name the only name.”*

The dramatic return of Jesus Christ to the very same Mount of Olives from which He left on His final ascension to His Father’s throne, [**Acts 1:12**].

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 [NIV] *“Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope. We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. According to the Lord’s own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord for ever. Therefore encourage each other with these words.”*

This is known by some as “the rapture” but it will not be a secret rapture but a very public one.

Romans 6:1-11 [NIV] *“What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning, so that grace may increase? By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? Or don’t you know that all of us who were baptised into Christ Jesus were baptised into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection. For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin, because anyone who has died has been freed from sin. Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him. The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God. In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus.”*

Just as we have joined Jesus Christ in His crucifixion, burial and resurrection, we will ascend into the clouds, to meet our Lord as He returns, then return to earth with Him, to work with Him as priests [teachers] and kings [rulers] in His Kingdom, [**Revelation 1:4-6; Revelation 5:9-10; 1 Peter 2:9-12**].

Does this knowledge make any difference as to how we live now?

1 Corinthians 15:50-58 [NIV] *“I declare to you, brothers, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed, in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For the perishable must clothe itself with the*

*imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: 'Death has been swallowed up in victory.' 'Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?' The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. **Therefore**, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labour in the Lord is not in vain."*

Note the word "therefore" [verse 58]. Whenever we read this in scripture we need to go back and re-read what has just been stated, for it to have the impact on our lives it is intended to have.

1 John 3:1-3 [NIV] *"How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure."*

To purify ourselves because our returning Saviour and Lord is pure, the Greek word used is "hagnizō," to be made clean, sanctified, from the root word "hagiōs" meaning holy.

1 Peter 1:3-16 [NIV] *"Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade, kept in heaven for you, who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that your faith, of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire, may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honour when Jesus Christ is revealed. Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls. Concerning this salvation, the prophets, who spoke of the grace that was to come to you, searched intently and with the greatest care, trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow. It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves but you, when they spoke of the things that have now been told you by those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven. Even angels long to look into these things. **Therefore, prepare your minds for action; be self-controlled; set your hope fully on the grace to be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed. As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: 'Be holy, because I am holy.'**"*

Note again the action word "therefore." Although we do not, cannot know the day of the Second Coming of Jesus Christ, [Matthew 24:36], there is work for us to do as disciples of Jesus Christ, just as there was work for the first disciples.

The commission that Jesus Christ gave to the first disciples, He has also given to us.

We have a gospel message to preach, a living example to show other human beings, [Matthew 5:13-16].

We also have available the same Holy Spirit to give us the power to complete our personal part of this commission.

We do **not** need to stand around gazing at the sky, waiting for Jesus Christ to return.

For that matter, neither do we need to be gazing at the scriptures for clues as to exactly when the Second Coming may be, when scripture tells us plainly it isn't for us to know.

Instead, we have the promise that Jesus Christ will return, and that should be enough for us.

1 Peter 3:15-16 [NIV] *"But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect,*

keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behaviour in Christ may be ashamed of their slander.”

We must always be prepared to answer all who may ask about our hope of Jesus Christ’s return to bring about a new world where love is the basis of all life.