

# ROAD TO ANASTASIS

## *Going Home!*

**John 1:1, 14 (ESV)** <sup>1</sup> *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. <sup>14</sup> And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.*

The Word – Jesus Christ dwelt among us. It was for a short period of time especially in the light of eternity – a sum of about 33 years. The Word of God became flesh and blood – died on the cross in our place – becoming the ultimate sacrifice for our sins. Then, the living Word of God came up out of that grave! His mission on earth was accomplished. It was time for Him to go home to the Father! He would make the trip within 40 days. His anastasis – His resurrection alarmed those who had so cruelly put Him to death.

“The rumors flew around Jerusalem like leaves blowing in the wind. People were claiming that Jesus, the Jewish rabbi who had been executed at Passover, had come back to life and was appearing to His followers. The high, priest, Caiaphas, was frustrated to no end. Would these rumors never die? He and the Sanhedrin had manipulated Governor Pilate into nailing this troublemaker to a Roman cross. The threat Jesus had posed to their control over the Jews should have died with Him. But after His buried body had gone missing, hundreds of people throughout Judea and Galilee claimed to have seen Him alive, and the rumors wouldn’t stop. The authorities knew the only way to get people to quiet down about Jesus was to produce His body and parade it through Jerusalem. But that body was nowhere to be found. – *Excerpt from A.D. The Bible Continues.*

What is the answer to the mystery of the missing body of Jesus? The answer is simple. There was no dead body to find. Jesus was no longer dead after three days. He is alive! You cannot be a Christian and not believe in the resurrection of Jesus. Even as Jesus was on His way to the cross, He was fully aware that after He had risen from the dead, many would still not believe the resurrection or accept Him. Jesus said, “...*they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.*” (**Luke 16:31**) But that is exactly what He did – come back to life!

**Read Acts 1:3 (ESV)** <sup>3</sup> *He presented himself alive to them after his suffering by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God.*

There are so many things concerning the life of Jesus that ‘inquiring minds’ would love to know that are not revealed in the scripture. John who was there said in **John 21:25 (ESV)** <sup>25</sup> *Now there are also many other things that Jesus did. Were every one of them to be written, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written.* Our Master Creator provides in His Word what we need to know concerning all aspects of God the Son. The Life Application Bible Commentary has compiled a chart of the biblical appearances of Jesus after the resurrection.

### JESUS’ APPEARANCES AFTER HIS RESURRECTION

|                             |                             |
|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Mary Magdalene              | Mark 16:9-11; John 20:10-18 |
| The other women at the tomb | Matt. 28:8-10               |

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|--|---|
| Peter in Jerusalem                         | Luke 24:34; 1 Cor. 15:5                     |
| The two travelers on the road              | Mark 16:12-13                               |
| Ten disciples behind closed doors          | Mark 16:14; Luke 24:36-43;<br>John 20:19-25 |
| All the disciples, with Thomas             | John 10:26-31; 1 Cor 15:5                   |
| Seven disciples while fishing              | John 21:1-14                                |
| Eleven disciples on the mountain           | Matt. 28:16-20                              |
| A crowd of 500                             | 1 Cor 15:6                                  |
| Jesus' brother James                       | 1 Cor 15:7                                  |
| Those who watched Jesus ascend into heaven | Luke 24:44-49; Acts 1:3-8                   |

Let's read what the Apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthians concerning the resurrection.

**Read 1 Corinthians 15:3-8 (ESV)** <sup>3</sup> For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, <sup>4</sup> that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, <sup>5</sup> and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. <sup>6</sup> Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. <sup>7</sup> Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. <sup>8</sup> Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me.

There will always be people who say that Jesus didn't rise from the dead. Paul assures us that many people saw Jesus after his resurrection. The Resurrection is a historical fact. Don't be discouraged by doubters who deny the Resurrection. Be filled with hope because of the knowledge that one day we, will see the living proof when Christ returns and we go home with Him to live forever.

### **The Reality of the Ascension**

An ascension can be described as rising, climbing, soaring. We have all seen airplanes ascend into the atmospheric heaven. Ascension can also be a reference to ascending to a throne or a place of power. In scripture ascension is the act of going to heaven in bodily form from earthly life. Enoch was the first to experience a heavenly ascension.

**Read Genesis 5:24 (ESV)** <sup>24</sup> Enoch walked with God, and he was not, for God took him.  
**Hebrews 11:5 (ESV)** <sup>5</sup> By faith Enoch was taken up so that he should not see death, and he was not found, because God had taken him. Now before he was taken he was commended as having pleased God.

Enoch believed God, walked with God, and went to be with God and left us with a good example to follow. He lived in a difficult time period –during those years before the Flood. Vice and violence were prevalent and only a remnant of people believed God **Genesis 6:5**

The next person to experience a heavenly ascension was Elijah.

**Read 2 Kings 2:1, 11 (ESV)** <sup>1</sup> *Now when the LORD was about to take Elijah up to heaven by a whirlwind, Elijah and Elisha were on their way from Gilgal... <sup>11</sup> And as they still went on and talked, behold, chariots of fire and horses of fire separated the two of them. And Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven.*

David Jeremiah speculates that the chariots and horses of fire were likely an angel squadron on special assignment. God had commanded Israel's kings to not stockpile horses **Deuteronomy 17:16** or to fear armies with chariots. **Deuteronomy 20:1** Every powerful resource we need is found in our God who fights for us!

### The Supreme Ascension

The supreme ascension is found in Jesus Christ. His ascension into heaven to be seated at the right hand of God (**Mark 16:19**) concluded His earthly ministry and allowed eyewitnesses to see both the risen Christ on earth and the victorious, eternal Christ returning home to heaven.

After His resurrection, Jesus did remain on earth for forty days and ministered to His disciples. He opened their minds to understand the Old Testament message about Himself and He prepared them to launch out in their new ministry. During His earthly ministry, they had misunderstood His mission. They thought that He was here to set up an earthly kingdom instead of a spiritual one. Jesus appeared and disappeared during those forty days, and the believers never knew when He might show up. It was excellent preparation for His body of believers soon to be known as the 'church' because the days were soon coming when He would no longer be on earth to instruct them personally. Believers today never know when our Lord may return, so our situation is somewhat similar to theirs. He will return just like He left – perhaps today!

**Read Acts 1:9 (ESV)** <sup>9</sup> *And when he [meaning Jesus] had said these things, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight*

We can only imagine how those watching Jesus as He soared into the heavens of heaven felt! One day we will have the same capacities demonstrated by our Savior on the day of His ascension. John, His disciple, said in **1 John 3:2 (ESV)** <sup>2</sup> *Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is.* What He is like physically, intellectually and spiritually sets the mold for our eternal existence!

Recent history confirms man's continuing dream to wing our way into the heavens. However, in order to 'space walk' one must have a specially designed suit and you better not snag a hole in that suit. Man's true hope of breaking away from the forces of gravity and rising to the heaven of heavens is found in the One who said in **John 11:25 (ESV)** <sup>25</sup> ... *"I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live.*

And what about that cloud! Possibly, it was similar to the cloud that had engulfed Him on the Mount of Transfiguration. **Matthew 17:5 (ESV)** <sup>5</sup> *He was still speaking when, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and a voice from the cloud said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him."* Matthew Henry speculates: "it is probable that when He had gone about as far from the earth as the clouds generally are; yet it was not such a spreading cloud as we commonly see, but such served to enclose Him." We read in **Psalms 104:3 (ESV)** <sup>3</sup> *He lays the beams of his chambers on the waters; he makes the clouds his chariot;*

*he rides on the wings of the wind.* Henry goes on to say, “God had often come down in a cloud; now He went up in one. Dr. Hammond thinks that the clouds receiving Him here were the angels receiving Him; for the appearance of angels is ordinarily described by a cloud.” Clouds can be considered a picture between heaven and earth as they collect water vapors rising up from the earth and then send dew down from the heavens. Jesus, the water of Life ascends in a cloud as the Mediator, our connection between God and man. Our prayers go up to heaven through Jesus as God's mercies come down from heaven upon us. Daniel in the Old Testament said in **Daniel 7:13 (ESV)** <sup>13</sup> *“I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him.*

Before Luke wrote the book of **Acts**, he wrote the gospel of **Luke**. Let’s read what he said of the ascension of Christ there.

**Read Luke 24:50-53 (ESV)** <sup>50</sup> *Then he led them out as far as Bethany, and lifting up his hands he blessed them.* <sup>51</sup> *While he blessed them, he parted from them and was carried up into heaven.* <sup>52</sup> *And they worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy,* <sup>53</sup> *and were continually in the temple blessing God.*

Bethany was on the slopes of the Mount of Olives and the ascension took place from somewhere on this hill. Luke describes the event with less detail here than he did in **Acts**. Luke does speak of His blessing the disciples. The last thing our Lord did was to serve as the perfect Priest who blesses His people and the first thing they did was to worship Him! The ascension differs radically from Jesus’ vanishing from the sight of the disciples at Emmaus and similar happenings. There is an air of finality about it. It is the decisive close of one chapter and the beginning of another.

### **After Christ’s Ascension!**

**Read Acts 1:10-11 (ESV)** <sup>10</sup> *And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes,* <sup>11</sup> *and said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.”*

The disciples were standing there on the hillside dumbfounded – probably with their mouths wide open. This couldn’t be the end! It was different than the other times – they felt it in their spirits but their humanness did not want to believe that He had left this earth. And two men dressed in white showed up – just appeared out of nowhere and gave them a promise from God: *This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.*” This is how we know the way this same Jesus will come back. The Old Testament prophet Zechariah details Christ’s return. **Zechariah 14:4 (ESV)** <sup>4</sup> *On that day his feet shall stand on the Mount of Olives that lies before Jerusalem on the east, and the Mount of Olives shall be split in two from east to west by a very wide valley, so that one half of the Mount shall move northward, and the other half southward.*

And what are we to do while we wait? We are to what Jesus told His first disciples to do: **Acts 1:8 (ESV)** <sup>8</sup> *But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”*

**Come and see! Then, go and tell!**