



DIGGING DEEPER

Heaven: Heaven and Earth

“In the beginning Eden was this perfect place where God, Creation, and Humanity lived in perfect harmony. There was work to be done, rest to be had, and relationships to enjoy. Marred by sin, Humanity had to exit this perfection and the story of the biblical narrative is of God’s rescue plan to destroy sin and bring humanity back to the garden. This week we will look at Eden and how it is a picture of heaven on earth.”

Paul Giving Up His Salvation

In Romans 9:3, Paul is describing his personal grief over Israel’s current state. Indeed, Paul could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers. There has been some discussion about whether this was a prayer, not just a wish, and whether Paul thought the wish was attainable (see the lengthy coverage in Cranfield 1975:454–57, who translates “I would pray [if it were permissible]”). The word normally has a prayer connotation, and Paul is then saying he would ask God for this if it would bring Israel to Christ. The Greek is *anathema*, and in Galatians 1:8, 9 (also 1 Cor 12:3; 16:22) it is translated in the niv as “eternally condemned.” In the lxx the Greek phrase can refer positively to a gift dedicated to God (Judg 16:19; 2 Maccabees 2:13; Lk 21:5) or negatively to something intended for destruction (Lev 27:28; Deut 7:26; Zech 14:11). This latter is the obvious use here. So to be cursed here has connotations of everlasting punishment. Even worse, Paul adds his willingness to be eternally separated literally “from the Messiah” (the definite article indicating Jesus’ messianic office). Paul cares so deeply for his people that he would be willing to

take their curse upon him. It is likely that there is an allusion here to Exodus 32:32, where after the golden calf incident Moses pleaded with God, "But now, please forgive their sin—but if not, then blot me out of the book you have written." Paul identified with Moses' deep-seated concern for Israel.

Osborne, G. R. (2004). Romans (pp. 236–237). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

How Did Jesus Leave the Earth?

This is a fun little article by Don Stewart about Jesus' Ascension:

One of the most significant events in the life of Christ was His ascension into heaven. The Bible teaches that forty days after His resurrection, Jesus ascended into heaven both visibly and bodily.

Luke

The only New Testament writer to record the ascension was Luke.

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 24:51,52).

Luke speaks of Jesus parting from them in a manner that assumes they were already familiar with the ascension account.

The Testimony Of The Book Of Acts

In the first chapter of the Book of Acts Luke records the following.

The former account I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach, until the day in which he was taken up, after he through the Holy Spirit had given commandments to the apostles whom he had chosen (Acts 1:1,2).

Jesus Ascended In Full View Of His Disciples

The Bible testifies that Jesus ascended into heaven in full view of His disciples.

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' (Acts 1:9-11).

Other Testimony To Jesus' Ascension

Scripture provides further testimony that Jesus ascended to His rightful place next to the Father. Stephen was the first believer put to death for his faith in Christ. As he was dying by stoning, he looked up into heaven and saw Jesus.

But he, being full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God, and said, 'Look! I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!' (Acts 7:55,56).

Stephen saw Jesus at the right hand (place of authority) of God the Father. This testified that Jesus ascended and remained in heaven.

Matthew

Even though the gospel of Matthew does not speak of the ascension closing Christ's earthly ministry, it does allude to its result.

Hereafter you shall see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of power, and coming on the clouds of heaven (Matthew 26:64)

Mark

Although the long ending of Mark may not be original, it certainly reflects an ancient belief. Here again we find the verb from Acts 1:2 in Mark 16:19.

So then, when the Lord Jesus had spoken to them, he was received up into heaven, and sat down at the right hand of God (Mark 16:19).

John

John's gospel also spoke of Jesus' ascension.

Jesus said to her, 'Stop clinging to me; for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to my brothers, and say to them, I ascend to my Father and your Father, and my God and your God'" (John 20:17).

Also, John has Christ predicting His ascension saying,

What then if you should behold the Son of Man ascending where he was before?" (John 6:62).

In light of this statement, the disciples should have been expecting to witness visibly Jesus' return to heaven

1 Timothy

The ancient Christian confession of includes the phrase

And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: He who 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).

The verb, "taken up" is the same verb as recorded in Acts 1:2.

Ephesians

Paul speaks of the ascension.

He who descended is also the one who ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things (Ephesians 4:10).

He also said.

Which he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places (Ephesians 1:20)

This exaltation could not have been accomplished without some sort of ascension, and the one described by Luke seems to be the one understood.

Therefore also God highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those who are in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Philippians 2:9-11). Paul explains theologically what Luke implies was accomplished in the ascension.

1 Peter

The apostle Peter spoke of Christ's ascension using the same word found in Acts 1:11. He speaks of Jesus Christ,

Who is at the right hand of God, having gone into heaven, after angels and authorities and powers had been subjected to him (1 Peter 3:22).

The tie between these two passages is close, and the theological implication is clear.

Hebrews

The writer to the Hebrews understands well what was accomplished by Christ's ascension.

Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession (Hebrews 4:14).

Similarly, in Hebrews 7:26, our high priest is spoken of as being "exalted above the heavens."

Summary

The reality of Jesus' ascension is testified by a number of New Testament writers. First, there is the historical narrative of Jesus ascending into heaven from the Mount of Olives. Luke records this in his gospel as well as the Book of Acts. In addition, the other two gospel writers allude to Jesus' ascension. Add to this is the testimony of Stephen, Paul, Peter, and the writer to the Hebrews. Consequently there are a number of different New Testament references to the ascension of Jesus.

[1]The Holy Bible, New King James Version, (Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson, Inc.) 1982.