

## Studies in the Book of Acts – Part 3

**“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.

In our last study, Jesus commanded the apostles to wait in Jerusalem for the baptism with the Holy Spirit and the Promise of the Father which had been prophesied to them before and He said that it was coming in “not many days.” In Mark 9.1, Jesus had told them that they would not die until they saw the “kingdom present with power” and now He says, “you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you” – so this is a time of great excitement and anticipation in the hearts of the apostles, but suddenly there is a shadow of sadness that falls across the page when Jesus leaves them. Acts 1.9 says, **“Now when He had spoken these things, while they watched, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight.”** The Gospels record this event in different words: **Mark** 16.19 simply says, **“He was received up into heaven...”** Luke 24.50-51 says, **“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.”** Acts 1.10 says, **“they looked steadfastly toward heaven as He went up.”** I understand that word translated “they looked steadfastly” may carry the idea that they were stretching up their arms – reaching up toward Him – and Luke’s Gospel says that He was speaking to them, blessing them, even as He ascended. Really this is a heartbreaking scene. These men, who had “come to believe and to know” that Jesus is “the Christ, the Son of the Living God” who had “the words of eternal life” (John 6.68-69); these

men who had spent three and a half years coming to love and honor Jesus and developing a friendship with Him; these men who had seen Jesus work unthinkable miracles: calming the sea, walking on water, raising the dead; these men who bore the burden of guilt for having abandoned Him in His hour of greatest need; these men who had watched Him be tortured and murdered, as they stood helplessly by; these men who had cowered into a locked room after His body was laid in the grave; these men who had seen Him alive again and spent the past 40 days hearing His gracious words of forgiveness and restoration, His powerful commands to conquer the world in His name, and His ominous predictions that they would share his brutal treatment and death for their ministry; and now He is going away – disappearing “**from their sight.**” And the Bible **says**, “**while they looked steadfastly [as they stood gazing] toward heaven as He went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel [if we read the accounts of the resurrection, especially of those who first found Jesus’ empty tomb, we will recognize these “men” as angels], 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.’**” I believe these words, like so many others spoken during this time, would have carried the apostle back again to the night of Jesus’ betrayal, when he first announced that He was going to a place that His disciples could not follow Him, and in **John** 14.1-3, He said: “**Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father’s house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also.**” If we combine the words of Jesus in John 14 with the words of the angels in Acts 1, we have a clear, beautiful, and informative picture of what the Bible says about the second coming of Jesus Christ, and I want to spend the remainder of our study considering those things.

First, it was **necessary** for Jesus to go into heaven. He had told His disciples, “**I go to prepare a place for you.**” This brings to my mind the old conquest of Canaan by the Israelites. You know, if God’s will had

been followed, the Land of Canaan as a home for the nation of Israel would have been the closest thing to heaven on earth since the Garden of Eden. In **Deuteronomy** 28.1-14, God said: “Now it shall come to pass, if you diligently obey the voice of the LORD your God, to observe carefully all His commandments which I command you today, that the LORD your God will set you high above all nations of the earth. And all these blessings shall come upon you and overtake you, because you obey the voice of the LORD your God: Blessed shall you be in the city, and blessed shall you be in the **country**. Blessed shall be the fruit of your body, the produce of your ground and the increase of your herds, the increase of your cattle and the offspring of your flocks. Blessed shall be your basket and your kneading bowl. Blessed shall you be when you come in, and blessed shall you be when you go out. The LORD will cause your enemies who rise against you to be defeated before your face; they shall come out against you one way and flee before you seven **ways**. The LORD will command the blessing on you in your storehouses and in all to which you set your hand, and He will bless you in the land which the LORD your God is giving you. The LORD will establish you as a holy people to Himself, just as He has sworn to you, if you keep the commandments of the LORD your God and walk in His ways. Then all peoples of the earth shall see that you are called by the name of the LORD, and they shall be afraid of you. **And** the LORD will grant you plenty of goods, in the fruit of your body, in the increase of your livestock, and in the produce of your ground, in the land of which the LORD swore to your fathers to give you. The LORD will open to you His good treasure, the heavens, to give the rain to your land in its season, and to bless all the work of your hand. You shall lend to many nations, but you shall not borrow. **And** the LORD will make you the head and not the tail; you shall be above only, and not be beneath, if you heed the commandments of the LORD your God, which I command you today, and are careful to observe them.” In Ezekiel 20.6, the Bible says God intended Canaan to be for Israel: “a land ‘flowing with milk and honey,’ the glory of all lands.” In **Exodus** 23.20-31 God said, “Behold, I send an Angel before you to keep you in the way and to bring you into the

place which I have prepared. Beware of Him and obey His voice; do not provoke Him, for He will not pardon your transgressions; for My name is in Him. But if you indeed obey His voice and do all that I speak, then I will be an enemy to your enemies and an adversary to your adversaries. **For** My Angel will go before you and bring you in to the Amorites and the Hittites and the Perizzites and the Canaanites and the Hivites and the Jebusites; and I will cut them off. You shall not bow down to their gods, nor serve them, nor do according to their works; but you shall utterly overthrow them and completely break down their sacred pillars. So you shall serve the LORD your God, and He will bless your bread and your **water**. And I will take sickness away from the midst of you. No one shall suffer miscarriage or be barren in your land; I will fulfill the number of your days. I will send My fear before you, I will cause confusion among all the people to whom you come, and will make all your enemies turn their backs to you. And I will send hornets before you, which shall drive out the Hivite, the Canaanite, and the Hittite from before you. **I** will not drive them out from before you in one year, lest the land become desolate and the beasts of the field become too numerous for you. Little by little I will drive them out from before you, until you have increased, and you inherit the land. And I will set your bounds from the Red Sea to the sea, Philistia, and from the desert to the River. **For I will deliver the inhabitants of the land into your hand, and you shall drive them out before you.**” So you see, God’s intention for Israel was to occupy Canaan “by faith” and if they had obeyed Him, Canaan would have been, as it was intended, a perfect type of heavenly reward of the saved! There would have been abundant prosperity, no disease, no suffering, no war, no enemies to tempt and allure! Tragically, the people did not obey God, and through their disobedience they marred the picture – yet the heavenly Canaan cannot be so marred and corrupted because it is not for us, for mere, weak, erring, sinful men to prepare that place – Jesus said, **“I go to prepare a place for you, and if I go I will come again!”** Other scriptures tell us that it was necessary for Jesus to “go away” in **order** to be our High Priest! Hebrews 8.4 says, **“For if He were on earth, He would not be a priest...”** Because as Hebrews 7.14 says, **“For it is evident that our**

Lord arose from Judah, of which tribe Moses spoke nothing concerning priesthood...” In **John** 16.5-7, Jesus said that He had “to go” in order for the Holy Spirit to come and do His work: **“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.”** In **John** 14.15-17, Jesus says something interesting about the presence the Holy Spirit would have with the apostles: **“If you love Me, keep My commandments. 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.”** Now, when Jesus says, “the world cannot receive” the Holy Spirit, the word “receive” is the same word used to talk about Jesus being “taken up” out of the sight of the apostles by the cloud (Acts 1.9), and it means to take away! Jesus was, in a sense, taken away from the disciples by the world who murdered Him through the crucifixion, and even though we was raised up from the dead, it was not possible that He should remain with His disciples on earth – but when the Spirit came, the world could not “**receive**” or take Him away! They couldn’t crucify the Spirit, because He didn’t have a body like Jesus did, **“they could not see Him or know Him.”** So, through the Spirit Jesus would be with the apostles **“always, even to the end of the age”** (Matthew 28.20) **“dwelling with them”** and being **“in them”** (John 14.17) and **“working with them”** (Mark 16.20). But it was also necessary for Jesus “to go” so that He could receive His **kingdom**. In Luke 19.11-12, the Bible says, **“Now as they heard these things, He spoke another parable, because He was near Jerusalem and because they thought the kingdom of God would appear immediately. Therefore, He said: “A certain nobleman went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom and to return.”** This language referred to a practice in the Roman Imperial system under-which the Jewish people lived during the days of Jesus. After Judea was conquered by General Pompey and became a tributary of Rome, in order to obtain a certification of his right to govern,

it was necessary for the local ruler to journey to the Imperial Capitol in Rome and receive the authoritative approval of the reigning Caesar. This is how Archelaus, the son of Herod the Great, had his authority reduced and eventually removed completely after a deputation of Jews went to Rome and appealed against his competence as a ruler. So Jesus, in illustrating what was necessary for the Kingdom of God to begin on earth, said that He would have to “go into a far country” (representing heaven) and “receive a kingdom” and in this case, the word kingdom refers to the authority to rule. That is precisely what happened when Jesus ascended into glory! Now, the New Testament is almost silent on this event. Other than a few statements in the parables and some isolated words of the Apostles here and there – but in the language of prophecy and poetry, the Old Testament paints a grand portrait of what happened on the other side of the clouds.

**Psalm** 68.17-18 says in RSV, “**With mighty chariotry, twice ten thousand, thousands upon thousands, the Lord came from Sinai into the holy place. Thou didst ascend the high mount, leading captives in thy train, and receiving gifts among men...**” The phrase: “**The Lord came from Sinai into the Holy Place**” described the amazing event when God moved out of the tabernacle and took up residence in the Temple on Mount Zion in Jerusalem, but it is figurative of a change from one dispensation to another – a great move of God. And the Apostle Paul tells us that these words were prophetic of what happened when Jesus ascended into Heaven! In **Ephesians** 4.8 Paul quotes the Psalm: “**When He ascended on high, He led captivity captive, and gave gifts to men.**” And when we receive Paul’s inspired commentary we see that after Jesus vanished from the sight of the Apostles, He was met by an innumerable host of angels and born into the heavenly sanctuary – thus marking a change in dispensation: the end of the old system of Sinai and Moses and the beginning of the New System of Jesus Christ the Son of God. The scripture says He, “**led captives in His train**” Paul says, “**He led captivity captive**” – in Colossians 2.15 he says, “**Having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it.**” So we see Jesus, marching in a cosmic

parade of triumph, accompanied by the holy angels and leading a long train of subjugated, disarmed evil spirits behind Him. In **Psalm** 24.7-10 we read what happened next. As Jesus neared the portals of Heaven, His entourage cried out to gatekeepers: **“Lift up your heads, O you gates! And be lifted up, you everlasting doors! And the King of glory shall come in.”** The gatekeepers respond: **“Who is this King of glory?”** And the hosts with Jesus answer: **“The LORD strong and mighty, the LORD mighty in battle. Lift up your heads, O you gates! Lift up, you everlasting doors! And the King of glory shall come in.”** Again the keepers cry, **“Who is this King of glory?”** and again the answer: **“The LORD of hosts, He is the King of glory.”** And upon entry into heaven, the **Prophet** Daniel picks up the vision: **“I watched till thrones were put in place, and the Ancient of Days was seated; His garment was white as snow, and the hair of His head was like pure wool. His throne was a fiery flame, its wheels a burning fire; A fiery stream issued and came forth from before Him. A thousand thousands ministered to Him; Ten thousand times ten thousand stood before Him.... And behold, One like the Son of Man, coming with the clouds of heaven! He came to the Ancient of Days, and they brought Him near before Him. Then to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and His kingdom the one which shall not be destroyed”** (Daniel 7.9-10, 13-14). In **Mark’s** Gospel, the Spirit confirmed the fulfilment of these prophecies with the simple words: **“So then, 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). In Psalm 110.1-4, David wrote: **“The LORD said to my Lord, ‘Sit at My right hand, till I make Your enemies Your footstool.’ The LORD shall send the rod of Your strength out of Zion. Rule in the midst of Your enemies.... The LORD has sworn and will not relent, ‘You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek [Remember Melchizedek was that mysterious figure from the Old Testament who served as a king and a priest together, and God said it would be the same for Jesus – He would be “a priest on His throne” (Zechariah 6.13)].”** The ascension, when Jesus went away into heaven

was the beginning of the Kingdom of God – the Gospel Age – that last days of the earth, and the Apostle Paul says that when He comes again, it will be “the end.” **1 Corinthians** 15.22-26 says, “**For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive. But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those who are Christ’s at His coming. Then comes the end, when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power. For He must reign till He has put all enemies under His feet. The last enemy that will be destroyed is death.**” It was necessary for Jesus to go into heaven!

But it also necessary for Him to come again, “**in like manner**” that He went (Acts 1.11). That phrase “**in like manner**” means, in the same way. When Jesus ascended, it was literal, physical, bodily, and visible and when He comes again it will be “**in like manner**” – in the same way.

In our closing moments, I want to consider what the Bible says will happen when Jesus comes again – at the end – at the close of the age. Now, considering that Paul says after Jesus returns, “**then comes the end and Jesus delivers the Kingdom over to the Father,**” we should realize immediately that there will be no seven years of tribulation, or 1000 years of worldwide domination of the planet by Jesus – those ideas come from misunderstands and misapplications of the scripture. The Bible never, in a single place, indicates that Jesus will set foot on this planet again – in fact, it strongly intimates the opposite! Remember in John 14.3, Jesus said, “**I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself** [Remember what that word means – Jesus will take us away from here, “**to Himself**”]; **that where I am, there you may be also.**” Not that where *we* are, here on earth, *He* may be also – but that where *He* is, in the Father’s House, in the place He has prepared for us, *we* may be also! The Bible says when Jesus comes again, He will **raise** the dead, the wicked and the righteous from their graves in incorruptible bodies, and then He will change the bodies of the living from mortal to immortal –

**John 5.28-29: “the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth—those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation.”**

**1 Corinthians 15.51-54: “We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed—in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: ‘Death is swallowed up in victory.’”**

**1 Thessalonians 4.16-17: “For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. 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 [in that way, in that manner, up there, not down here] we shall always be with the Lord.”**

**Then**, the world and all the material universe will be destroyed –

**2 Peter 3.10-13: “But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up. Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat? **Nevertheless** we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.”** There is no reason to take this verses figuratively, in fact the whole of scripture endorses that the future of the saints is “up” “in heaven” “with God” – not down here on earth!

**Matthew 6.19-21:** “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”

**2 Corinthians 4.16-18:** “Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal.”

After we are up there, and this world is gone, we will be taken to **judgment**. Always the Bible speaks of only one judgment where the lost and saved, and good and evil are assigned to their eternal punishments and rewards together. It is always “**that day**” and “**the day**.”

**2 Corinthians 5.10-11:** “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad. Knowing, therefore, the terror of the Lord, we persuade men...”

**Matthew 25.31-46:** “When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory. All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats. And He will set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left. **Then** the King will say to those on His right hand, ‘Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world... Then He will also say to those on the left hand, ‘Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire

**prepared for the devil and his angels... And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.”**

And after the will of God is finally and fully established – after sin unpardoned is punished – and all the work of Satan against God’s creation is purged and put away – the Kingdom will appear complete in world of Glory!