

Study Notes:

Acts 1:9–11

Three reasons Jesus appeared to his disciples over a 40-day period:

1. To prove he was physically alive and to give them a teaching context for their apostolic work.
2. To command the disciples to wait for the Father's Promise
3. To correct the disciples' misconceptions about what was to come next on God's timeline for Israel.

- **Jesus' Appearances:**

During these 40 days, Jesus appeared at least 10 different times: Jerusalem, Galilee (twice), The outskirts of Jerusalem.

No less than 10 appearances over 40 days puts that beyond reason – especially since, at one point, over 500 people saw Jesus at one time. – I Corinthians 15:6

Luke's record of this 40-day period is the reason why the Christian calendar has Ascension Day on the fortieth day after Easter.

- **The Geography of the Ascension:** The Mount of Olives at Bethany.

The Mount of Olives is more like a hill than a true mountain. Its elevation is around 400 feet above sea level, whereas Jerusalem is around 200.

The Mount of Olives has two sides to it. Jesus and his disciples are on the back side of the Mount – the same side as Bethany is on. If you continued, you would arrive in the desert in Jericho by the Dead Sea.

- **Was the Ascension the first time Jesus had been to the Father's throne since his resurrection?**

V. 9: *"Having said this he was taken up, while they looked on, and a cloud received him out of their sight."*

Luke's account seems to portray Jesus' resurrection and ascension as one sweeping movement – resulting in his exaltation. Was the ascension the first time Jesus had been to the Father's throne since his resurrection?

Jack Kelly offers an interesting insight into this question:

According to Hebrews 9:11-12 Jesus went into the temple in heaven to sprinkle His blood on the altar there, acting as our High Priest. This happened on resurrection morning (John 20:17). He returned that afternoon and met with two disciples on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-32) and then with more of them that night (John 20:19-23).

He could have gone back and forth a number of times in the 40 days after the resurrection, and even more since. Remember, He didn't meet Paul on the Damascus Road until several years later. But there was only one official "Ascension" and that's the one from the Mt. of Olives mentioned in Acts 1:6-11.

F.F. Bruce makes a similar point when he writes, "Nor are we intended to suppose ... the forty days were passed by him in some intermediate, earth-bound state."

How many times did Jesus go back and forth between heaven and his disciples during that 40-day period? We simply don't know. But as FF Bruce points out, he wasn't in some, "intermediate, earth-bound state."

Look at verse 9 again: *"Having said this he was taken up, while they*

looked on, and a cloud received him out of their sight."

This isn't the only time Jesus is said to have vanished from sight: It happened in Luke 24 at the end of Jesus' walk and supper with the two disciples from Emmaus.

The best understanding of the Ascension at Bethany: For 40 days Jesus appeared at different times to his followers. Because he was not bound by time and space, He may have gone between the Father and his disciples many times.

The Ascension at Bethany didn't mark Jesus' first return to the Father. Instead, it was the culmination of a series of at least 10 visitations to his followers.

- **“Jesus Taken Up And A Cloud Received Him Out Of Their Sight”:**

Note: “Taken up” does not insist that Jesus rose miles and miles into the atmosphere on his way to the Father's side.

I think it's clear that is what happened. A cloud envelopes Jesus and moments later he is no longer visible to the disciples. Notice that Luke references Jesus being received out of their sight by a “cloud”.

In his gospel Luke has referenced this before – at the Mount of Transfiguration. In Luke 9, he tells us about Jesus' transfiguration and ends the incident with these words:

“A cloud came and overshadowed them; ... and a voice came out of the cloud, saying, ‘This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!’ And when the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone”. - Luke 9:34–36

The Mount of Transfiguration marks the moment Peter, James, and John see what the pre-existent Son of God looks like in his glory. The Mount of Ascension has the same hallmark.

Jesus' Parousia: Mark 13:26- The Son of Man will return in “clouds with

great power and glory". Mark 14:62 – He will be “coming with the clouds of heaven”.

Three succeeding manifestations of Jesus' glory: The Transfiguration, The Ascension, and the Parousia. In each case, we find clouds referenced.

- **The Glory Cloud:**

“Glory Cloud” (Hebrew “Shekinah”) – The cloud that rested above Moses' tabernacle and filled Solomon's Temple when it was dedicated. See: Exodus 40:34; 1 Kings 8:10

In both cases, the “Shekinah” was the visible indication that God's presence had taken residence in a place set aside for his glory.

- **Was Jesus' Ascension Permanent?**

Acts 1:10: “They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them.”

Some scholars have suggested the apostles thought the cloud would dissipate and Jesus would remain with them – like their experience at His Transfiguration. But then, two figures in white robes appear just like the two men in Luke's Gospel who appeared to the women at the empty tomb of Jesus “in dazzling apparel”. - Luke 24:4

- The reason there are two angelic messengers in both accounts:

In the Old Testament, the minimum number of witnesses for any testimony was two. Deuteronomy 19:15 states, “A matter must be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.”

Since two witnesses are the minimum number for a credible testimony, it seems reasonable that it may be the same two figures who bore witness to Jesus' resurrection. In the latter case, they are harbingers of Jesus Return.

Verse 11: “Men of Galilee, 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.”

1. “This Same Jesus”

During his final days of earthly ministry, Jesus taught his followers about the end times. He spoke of Israel's suffering, the pains the world would experience, and the dangers of false Messiahs appearing. See: Matthew 24:23-24

“This Same Jesus”. The angels at the Ascension are giving us clear direction. We are to look for the same Jesus to return to us – not a substitute Jesus, not a reasonable facsimile, not someone much like Jesus. No, we are to wait for the Same Jesus.

The angels at Bethany have given us an important indication of what we should look for; the Same Jesus.

False Christs have come and gone since the first century. See: 2 Corinthians 11:12-14 Since Paul's day, how many times has someone claimed to be the Messiah? How many times has some branch of Christianity strayed from the truth and created another Jesus?

There were false Christs in Paul's day – and we have had our share of them in our own century:

- Jim Jones- The Peoples Temple
- Sun Myung Moon- The Unification Church, Seoul, South Korea
- David Koresh – The Branch Davidians
- Apollo Quibolo - The Kingdom of Jesus Christ.
- A.J. Miller- Australia-based Divine Truth movement.
- Sergey Torop – The Church of the Last Testament in Southern Siberia.

2. “In The Same Way”

“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.”

“In the same way” ... tells us how Jesus will return in the Parousia – the very same way He left at Bethany. He left in clouds of glory: He will return in clouds of glory.

In the meantime, the Holy Spirit would serve as the very real connection between Jesus and his followers: That is much of what the rest of the Book of Acts is all about.