

BIBLE STUDY
May 10, 2021

THE ASCENSION OF THE LORD

Acts 1: 1-11
Mark 16: 15-20
Ephesians 4: 1-13

- 1. The Paschal Mystery:** The events of the Lord's death and resurrection are called the Paschal Mystery. The Paschal Mystery is comprised of the Suffering, the Death, the Burial, the Resurrection, the Appearances after the Resurrection, the Ascension and the Sending of the Holy Spirit. It is all one great event of our salvation, but each Gospel describes the Paschal Mystery in a different way. The original version of Mark speaks very little of the Resurrection. Matthew speaks of one apparition to the disciples in Galilee in which he commissions them. Luke extends the time of the Apparitions to forty days before Jesus ascends into heaven and then nine days until the coming of the Holy Spirit. For John, Jesus' exaltation is his crucifixion. His glorification (Resurrection, Ascension and Sending of the Spirit) all happen on the Day of Resurrection (Easter). There is no contradiction. They are all trying to imagine the unimaginable and describe the indescribable. In our worship we follow the timeline of Luke by celebrating the Ascension of the Lord forty days after Easter (we move the feast day to the next Sunday) and Pentecost on the fiftieth day.
- 2. Mark 16: 15-20**
 - The Gospel of Mark has two endings: The Shorter Ending and the Longer Ending. The Longer Ending has been accepted as part of the Gospel for centuries. However, there were found to very authoritative manuscripts of the Gospel of Mark from the fourth century AD that ends the Gospel at 16: 8. That has led some to think that Mark's original intent was to end the Gospel with the Shorter Ending. Although we accept the Longer Ending as canonical, it is interesting to consider the impact of the Shorter Ending being the conclusion of the Gospel.
 - V. 14: Jesus strikes a severe tone as he scolds the disciples for their unbelief. This is different from the other Gospels in which Jesus consoles the disciples, but it is consistent with Mark's Gospel where Jesus is very critical of the disciples' hardness of heart throughout the Gospel.
 - V. 15: Jesus commissions the disciples to spread the Good News to the entire world—to both Jew and Gentile. This is consistent with the curtain of the temple being torn in two and the Roman centurion's profession of faith at the end of the Gospel.
 - V. 16: The preaching of the Gospel will present each person with a choice to believe and be saved or to not believe and be condemned. This is consistent with Mark's emphasis on the time of Jesus as being the "Kairos," the time appointed by God for salvation which demands a response from each person.
 - V. 17: Signs that will validate the messengers of the Gospel: driving out demons and speaking in tongues—these are familiar throughout the NT.

- V. 18: Picking up serpents and drinking poisons—these are not found in other NT traditions. Laying on hands on the sick continues the healing ministry of Jesus.
- V. 19: The Ascension of Jesus: He is taken up into heaven and takes his seat at the right hand of God. The right hand is the seat of honor and glory. This is a majestic picture of the triumph of Jesus over sin and death. He has accomplished his mission.
- V. 20: The disciples go forth to the whole world with their mission of preaching to every person. The Lord Jesus is present to them as they go and confirms their mission with miraculous signs.

3. Ephesians 4: 1-13

- V. 1: Paul pleads for unity in the church. Living in unity and peace is the appropriate response to God's call.
- V. 2 Living in unity means living with humility, gentleness and patience. It also means that we work with one another out of love.
- V. 3: We make unity our goal and resolve to achieve it by being dedicated to peace.
- V. 4: There are seven “ones” or “unities:” one body, one Spirit, one hope,
- V. 5: one Lord, one faith, one baptism,
- V. 6: one God and Father of all. God is one as opposed to pagan gods that are many and always in conflict and competition. We are to be one as God is one.
- V. 7: From the one God, Christ in glory bestows grace/gifts as he wishes.
- V. 8: Quote from Psalm 68:18: An image of God in triumph leading Israel to Jerusalem. Now it is Christ who is raised up in glory so that he can let gifts flow forth to us. Prisoners are sin and death.
- V. 9: He ascended implies that he descended. Descending to the lower regions probably refers to the Incarnation, through which the Son of God took on human nature and flesh. It is probably not referring to the descent into hell described in 1 Peter 3: 19.
- V. 10: Christ who is now glorified is truly the same as Jesus of Nazareth who became a human person. He descended and ascended so that he might fill us all with his gifts of grace.
- V. 11: The gifts of ministry that the Lord bestows are apostles, prophets, evangelists (preachers of the Gospel not writers), pastors and teachers.
- V. 12 These ministries fortify and strengthen the believers for the work of ministry, i.e. preaching the Good News and living in unity.
- V. 13: We are being built up into the Body of Christ. When we attain the unity of faith and knowledge of the Son of God, then we will reach the full stature of Christ. When we are truly one, then we resemble Christ more and more. The Church which is the Body of Christ resembles Christ when it lives in unity and peace.