

What's to celebrate on Ascension Day?

The **Ascension** is one of the great celebrations in the calendar, and commemorates the bodily Ascension of Jesus Christ into heaven in the presence of His disciples. Ascension Day is officially celebrated this year on a Thursday, May 1st April, the fortieth day after Easter.

The first account of the Ascension found in the Bible is in the **Gospel of Mark** (16:14-19)

Later Jesus appeared to the Eleven as they were eating; he rebuked them for their lack of faith and their stubborn refusal to believe those who had seen him after he had risen. He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned. And these signs will accompany those who believe: In my name they will drive out demons; they will speak in new tongues; they will pick up snakes with their hands; and when they drink deadly poison, it will not hurt them at all; they will place their hands on sick people, and they will get well." After the Lord Jesus had spoken to them, he was taken up into heaven and he sat at the right hand of God.

The description is brief: Jesus and the remaining eleven apostles are seated at a table, presumably in a room in or near Jerusalem. Jesus commands his followers to spread the Gospel and that those who believe will be known by their invulnerability to poison, ability to heal the sick, exorcise demons, and the like. After delivering these final words, Jesus is received into heaven to sit at the right hand of God. No description of the Ascension itself is given; Mark simply states that it happened.

The second account. In the Gospel of Luke is even briefer in its description in Luke 24:50-53.

When he had led them out to the vicinity of Bethany, he lifted up his hands and blessed them. While he was blessing them, he left them and was taken up into heaven. Then they worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy. And they stayed continually at the temple, praising God.

Jesus led the eleven to Bethany, not far from Jerusalem. While in the act of blessing them, Jesus was carried up to heaven.

Not only is the Ascension related in the passages of Scripture cited above, but it is also elsewhere predicted and spoken of as an established fact. Thus, in John 6:62, Christ asks the Jews: "What if then you shall see the son of Man ascend up where He was before?" and 20:17, He says to Mary Magdalene: "Do not touch (translated "approach" in the Aramaic) Me, for I am not yet ascended to My Father, but go to My brethren, and say to them: I ascend to My Father and to your Father, to My God and to your God."

The third account of the Ascension is in the **Acts of the Apostles 1:8-12.**

“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight. They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. “Men of Galilee,” they said, “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.” Then they returned to Jerusalem from the hill called the Mount of Olives, a Sabbath day’s walk from the city”

For forty days after the Resurrection, Jesus continued to teach his followers. Jesus and the eleven were gathered near Mount Olivet, to the northeast of Bethany. Jesus tells His apostles that they will receive the power of the Holy Spirit, and that they will spread His message the world over. Jesus is taken up and received by a cloud. Two men clothed in white, thought to be angels appear and tell the apostles that Jesus will return in the same manner as He was taken.

Although the *place* of the Ascension is never distinctly stated, it would appear from Acts that it could have been the Mount of Olives, since after the Ascension the apostles are described as returning to Jerusalem from the mount that is called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, within a Sabbath day's journey. Tradition has consecrated this site as the Mount of Ascension .

What's to celebrate about Ascension Day? Not every believer celebrates it or even talks about it this year. Many books of the New Testament of the Bible don't mention it. But other New Testament books mention it over and over again. Three of these books are the Acts of the Apostles, Paul's Letter to the Ephesians, and the letter to the Hebrews. Those authors clearly were excited about Ascension Day. Let's see why...

Why did Luke mention Ascension Day so often in the book of Acts? The first chapters of Acts describe the apostles preaching in Jerusalem. They were preaching to people who had humiliated and murdered Jesus. These people had seen Jesus at his lowest. But on Ascension Day, God had enthroned Jesus in heaven and seated Him at His right hand. The apostles tried to get the people to understand how serious their sin was. They had killed the King of kings. But they weren't left hopeless, because this King was giving them a second chance. He was alive and on His throne and held no grudge against them. In other words, the apostles mentioned Ascension Day so people would urgently want to repent for everything bad they had done to Jesus.

Why did Paul mention Jesus Christ's ascension so often in his letter to the Ephesians? When he wrote that letter, Paul was imprisoned. He wanted his dear friends in Ephesus not to worry. Things didn't look too good. Paul was being treated like a criminal. But Paul wrote to remind them how glorious being a believer is. What better way to do that than to show how the believers are closely connected to Jesus, the powerful Ruler of the universe! The same power that could make a human being the Ruler of the universe is the power God uses to protect believers.. The same power that could allow Jesus, in his human body, to be everywhere in the universe at one time is the power God uses for the good of the believers. Even a believer in prison has a lot of power on his side, because his ascended Jesus is on his side.

Why did the man who wrote the letter to the Hebrews mention Jesus' ascension so often? He was worried about the Christian Jews in Jerusalem. Life was tough for them. They were being discriminated against. They had few civil rights. Society said, "Compromise a little. Come back to your roots, our ancient Jewish customs and worship." The author of Hebrews wanted to show them what that compromise would cost them. They could go back to the priests in the temple at Jerusalem. But Jesus had ascended to be their priest in heaven, God's real temple. They could pay for priests to busy-body around sacrificing animals for their sins day after day. But Jesus had already sacrificed Himself on the cross for their sins. And He had shown their sins were all paid for when He sat down on His throne in heaven. Ascension Day would show these Christian Jews what it meant to abandon Christianity. They would be abandoning the highest of the High Priests, along with His care and His prayers. Ascension Day is a very important day. It's a glimpse of how glorious it is to be a believer.

What is Jesus doing now in heaven?

In John 14:1-3 Jesus taught His disciples that He would return to heaven to prepare places for them. Praise the mighty Name of Jesus! He is in heaven now preparing places for His followers.

"Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am."

Jesus is also in heaven making intercession for those who believe in Him as recorded in Romans 8:33-35.

Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died--more than that, who was raised to life--is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?

Our mighty INTERCESSOR AND MEDIATOR is seated at the right hand of God!

We come to an ALMIGHTY and HOLY God in the Name of Jesus.

We pray in the Name of Jesus.

We are baptized in the Name of Jesus.

We teach and preach in the Name of Jesus.

We are healed by faith in the Name of Jesus.

We have authority over evil spirits in the Name of Jesus.

And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

(Colossians 3:17)