Lesson: The Ascension of Christ

The ascension of Christ is celebrated by counting forty days after Easter Sunday; so, it will always fall on a Thursday, though a special service is often conducted the Sunday after. Easter varies from year to year based loosely on the vernal equinox, and so will Holy Week, Ascension Day, and associated Jewish feasts during this season. We know that Jesus continued to minister for forty days and nights following His resurrection, then ascended into heaven while His followers watched. He took His place in heaven at the right hand of God where He sits in judgment. When He departed earth, Jesus left His Holy Spirit behind to comfort those who follow Him.

* MAR 16:19; LUK 24:50–53 ~ Jesus led them to Bethany where He lifted up His hands and blessed them. While He spoke, He arose into heaven. They worshipped Him and returned to Jerusalem with joy.
* ACT 1:9–11~ While He spoke these things, Jesus ascended above the clouds. As they stared into heaven two angels appeared with them and said, “Men of Galilee, why do you gaze into heaven. Jesus, who you just saw ascend into heaven, will return the very same way.”

Forty is a common theme in the Bible; for instance, forty years represents a generation. Jesus was in the wilderness forty days where He was tempted by Satan and He was on the earth after His resurrection forty days prior to His ascension. Thus, Christ began His ministry fasting forty days in the wilderness after his baptism, and ended it forty days after His resurrection in His glorified body. The Israelites wandered the wilderness for forty years, which was one year for each day they sinned while Moses was on Mt. Sinai. These are but a few references illustrating the importance of the number forty.

* GEN 7:4–17 ~ God made it rain for forty days and nights after Noah loaded the ark.
* GEN 50:1, 3 ~ Joseph was deeply saddened when his father Jacob died. He mourned for forty days, because the custom was to allow the embalmed body to rest in state forty days.
* EXO 24:18; EXO 34:28; NUM 14:33–34; NUM 32:13; DEU 2:7; DEU 9:18; DEU 10:10 ~ The Lord’s anger against Israel was provoked for worshipping the golden calf. God made them wander the wilderness for forty years, until the adults from that generation which committed evil before the Lord had died. They spent one year for each day they sinned while Moses was on the mountain.
* JOS 5:6 ~ The children of Israel wandered forty years in the wilderness, until all the men of war which came out of Egypt were consumed, because they disobeyed the voice of the Lord. For the Lord had warned them that He would not show them the land flowing with milk and honey promised to their fathers.
* LUK 4:1–2 ~ Jesus was filled with the Holy Spirit who led Him into the wilderness. He was tempted during the forty days He fasted there.
* ACT 1:3 ~ Jesus Christ showed Himself alive for forty days, after being crucified to death, speaking about the kingdom of God. He proved to us many times that He had unquestionably risen from the dead.

When Jesus ascended into heaven, He resumed His position at God’s right hand. Jesus is the instrument of God’s hand on earth. And He will judge every human being with respect to their conduct and faith (PSA 96:13; PSA 98:9; JOH 5:22; ACT 10:42). Christ will return to earth and bring His faithful up to heaven with Him, after which He will judge the rest of humanity who remain under the Law, because they rejected His Grace.

* PSA 16:10–11 ~ God will not leave my soul in hell, and He will not allow His Holy One to be corrupted. He will show me the path of life. In His presence will be fullness of joy; with His right hand there are pleasures forevermore.
* PSA 80:14–19 ~ Return to us Almighty God! Look down from heaven and see! Watch over this vineyard that your right hand has planted, and the Branch you have raised up for yourself. The vine has been cut down and burned in the fire; at your rebuke your people perish. Let your hand rest on the man at your right, the Son of man who you raised. Do this so we will not turn our backs on you. Revive us so we can call upon your name. Turn us back, Lord of hosts, and let your face shine upon us so we can be saved.
* PSA 110:1, 4 ~ The Lord said to my Lord, “Sit at my right hand and I will make your enemies your footstool.” He is priest forever, after the order of Melchizedek.
* PSA 118:15–16 ~ The Lord is my strength and song; He has become my salvation. The voice of rejoicing and salvation are in the tabernacles of the righteous, announcing the right hand of the Lord who goes valiantly before us. The right hand of God is exalted.
* ISA 48:12–13 ~ God said, “Listen to me oh Jacob, Israel who I have called; I AM He. I AM the first and the last. My hand laid the foundation of the earth, and my right hand spans the heavens. When I call, all will stand up in unison.”
* MAR 14:61–62 ~ The high priest asked Jesus, “Are you the Christ?” Jesus replied, “I AM. And you will see the Son of man sitting at the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven.”
* ACT 5:30–32 ~ God exalted Jesus as Prince and Savior with His own right hand, so that He might give repentance and forgiveness to Israel. We are witnesses to these things, and so is the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey Him.”
* ACT 7:55–56 ~ Stephen, being enthralled by the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at His right hand. And Stephen proclaimed, “Behold, I see an opening in the heavens and the Son of man standing at God’s right hand.”
* ROM 8:34 ~ Who is He, who condemns? It is Christ who died, and more than that, who rose from the dead and now sits at the right hand of God, and who also intercedes for us.
* EPH 1:20–21 ~ God set Jesus at His right hand, with power greater than all principalities, powers, and dominions. His name is above every other name in this world and the world to come.
* HEB 1:3; HEB 8:1–2 ~ The Son is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of His being, sustaining all things by His powerful Word. After He had provided purification for sins, He sat down at the right hand of His Majesty in heaven. To summarize, we have a High Priest, who sits at the right hand of God’s throne in heaven and who serves in the sanctuary, the true tabernacle, set up by the Lord and not by man.
* REV 1:18 ~ When I saw Him, I fell before His feet as dead. And He laid His right hand upon me and said, “Do not fear. I AM the first and the last. I AM He, who lives though He was dead; and here, I AM alive forevermore, Amen. I hold the keys to hell and death. Write down the things you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will be hereafter.”

At His ascension, Jesus left His Spirit behind to comfort us. The Bible speaks of the Holy Spirit as our Comforter. It is He who stays with us at all times to show us the way to go, giving us the words to speak, and protecting us as we minister for the true Word, which is Christ.

* PSA 23:3–4 ~ The Lord restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for His namesake. Even when I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for His rod and staff protect and comfort me.
* ECC 4:1 ~ I saw oppression occurring under the sun; I saw the tears of the down and out, and noticed that they had no comforter. Even though they had power, they had no comforter.
* ISA 61:1–3 ~ The Spirit of God is upon me, because He has directed me to preach His good news to the humble, to heal the broken hearted, to free the slaves, and to release those who are bound in chains and in prison; to proclaim the Lord’s favor and His vengeance, to comfort all who mourn, and to tell those who mourn to exchange their ashes for beauty; to replace mourning with joy, and to don the garment of praise in exchange for the spirit of sorrow, so that they may be trees of righteousness, planted by the Lord for His glorification.
* ZEC 1:16–17 ~ I will return to Jerusalem with mercy, and I will rebuild my house there. My cities will prosper again; I will again comfort Zion, and I will again choose Jerusalem.
* LUK 4:16–20 ~ Jesus came to Nazareth and stood in the synagogue on the Sabbath day. He was handed the book of Isaiah to read aloud (ISA 61 above). After reading it, He closed the book and sat down, while everyone stared at Him. Then He proclaimed, “That scripture was fulfilled as you were hearing it.”
* JOH 14:26 ~ Jesus said, “God will send the Comforter in my name, which is the Holy Spirit. He will teach you everything, and will help you remember all the things I have taught you.”
* JOH 15:26 ~ Jesus said, “I will send the Comforter from the Father, which is the Spirit of truth that proceeds from the Father to testify about me.”
* JOH 16:7, 13 ~ It is good for me to go, because until I am gone, the Comforter cannot come; but I will send Him to you when I leave. When the Spirit of truth comes, He will guide you into all truth. He will speak the words of God and will show you what is yet to come.”
* 2 CO 1:3–5 ~ Blessed is God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and the God of comfort who comforts us in our tribulations, so that we may comfort others who are troubled, with the same comfort God has given to us. Whereas our sufferings in Christ are many, so also our consolation in Christ is abundant.

It is interesting how Jesus arrived on this planet by the Holy Spirit coming down to impregnate the virgin, Mary. And when Jesus ascended into heaven, His Spirit came down again to stay with us, as He was ascending to sit beside His Father and rule at His right hand.

* ISA 7:14 ~ God Himself will provide the sign: A virgin shall conceive and bear a son. His name will be called “God with us.”
* MAT 1:18, 20, 24–25 ~ Mary, before she had come together with Joseph, became pregnant by the Holy Spirit. God made this fact known to Joseph in a dream. Joseph took Mary to be his wife, but did not consummate their marriage until after Jesus was born.
* LUK 1:35 ~ The angel told Mary, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you. Therefore, your child will be called the Son of God.”

Heavenly Father, how great are your works and your plan of salvation. Though there are many pieces to the grand scheme, they all come together for us in the Holy Bible. This is why we are compelled to take the time to read it, study it, digest it, and teach it. Thank you for making your Word clear for anyone who seeks the truth; let us always stand for the truth and speak the truth, as a testimony to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, in whose name we pray, Amen.

By Andrew V. Barber (posted: 06/01/2023)