

Bi123 The Gospels 2

Lesson Bi123-30 The Ascension

When a person has lived a godly life, they often want to do something special for their children and grandchildren. This is sometimes a special word or blessing given before their death. They follow the example of Jacob in the first book of the Bible, when he blessed his sons and those of Joseph. These “last words” of wisdom can be a great treasure, and give special inspiration and guidance to the next generation. In this lesson Jesus was ready to leave this earth. He gave the disciples his last words and his blessing. His words related to the content of the gospel and what he wanted his followers to do.

Jesus had taught his disciples that everything written about him in the Law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms must be fulfilled. These were the three main parts of the Jewish Scriptures. Before he ascended, Jesus opened their minds so they could understand them. He told them, “This is what is written: The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high” (Luke 24:44-49).

Jesus opened their minds by explaining the three main truths of the gospel from fulfilled prophecy. The Messiah, the sinless son of God, came to earth. Second, he suffered and died for the sins of all people. Third, by rising from the dead, he conquered death. His followers were to preach repentance for the forgiveness of sins as they told all people everywhere about Jesus. They could tell the story because they were eyewitnesses. But before they went out with this message, they needed power from heaven. Christ would send the power of the Holy Spirit to work and speak through them. This was God’s promise through the prophet Joel.

Luke continued his account in the book of Acts. He states that on one occasion after his resurrection, while Jesus was eating with the disciples, he again gave them this command. “Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.” They recalled that John had said that he baptized with water to indicate repentance, but one was coming who would baptize with the Holy Spirit and fire, to give them supernatural power (Luke 3:16). This time Jesus would be the baptizer. The disciples would be filled with God’s power to proclaim God’s message throughout the world. But, they would need patience to wait for God’s timing for this event.

Then they gathered around him and asked him, “Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?” Like other Jews, they were looking for the deliverance of Israel from Rome. They still expected Jesus to set up an earthly kingdom. They assumed that the coming of the Spirit might be the beginning of the new age.

Jesus said to them: “It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. 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” (Acts 1:4-8). Some disciples still believed Jesus would establish his earthly kingdom at that time. He explained that such dates were in the Father’s control. Their responsibility was to receive the Spirit and be his witnesses.

The proclamation was to start in Jerusalem, the local religious center. Then soon they would go to the rest of Judea, then the near countryside, including to those Samaritans whom they disliked. Within a few years peoples all over the earth would hear. We see it happening in the Book of Acts. For today’s believers the pattern remains the same. An outreach begins first in the home city, next to nearby areas, and finally to the far corners of the world. This summarizes the whole plan of God until Jesus returns.

When Jesus led his followers 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 (Luke 24:50-53).

From the Mount of Olives, Jesus blessed the disciples and was carried up into heaven. As they watched he was lifted up into the clouds. This happened 40 days after the Resurrection. Their response was joy and worship directed to Jesus. No doubt as they watched him slowly ascend, they realized they would see him no more.

He was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight. It was no ordinary vapor cloud, but a symbol of the glorious Shekinah presence of God. 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” (Acts 1:9-11). The two angels promised that Jesus would return in the same visible glorious way he had departed in the clouds.

The ascension meant that Jesus had broken off visible fellowship with his disciples on earth. Still bearing his resurrected body, he had entered the world of God’s dwelling. This world is not visible to humans. Even though they couldn’t see him, he promised to be with them always through his Spirit. They waited to receive the Spirit. The day of Pentecost came 10 days later, when the baptism with the Holy Spirit occurred. After that, multitudes believed through their ministry. Their Spirit-empowered witness became the content of the Book of Acts.

This story is **important** because it gives us the final promise and command of Jesus. We are to receive the power of his Spirit and be his witnesses.

The **main truth** of this story is that Christ commanded his disciples to be witnesses of the gospel in the power of the Spirit.

Let’s **review** this lesson—

1. What did Jesus say were the main truths of the gospel that the disciples should tell others?
A. [Pause] If you answered, "The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance for the forgiveness of sin will be preached in his name to all nations," you answered correctly.
2. To what three places did Jesus tell the disciples to take the gospel witness?
A. [Pause] If you answered, "Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth," you are right.
3. What did Jesus say the disciples needed before they left on their mission?
A. [Pause] If you answered that they needed the gift the Father had promised, the baptism with the Holy Spirit, you are correct.

Your **assignment** for this lesson is to learn the complete story so you can tell it from memory. After you tell it to someone, ask them this question, "What did we learn about the purpose of God for the church today?" Answer: The church should be a witness to the gospel everywhere and to everyone in the power of the Holy Spirit.