



Ascension

w/c 17 May 2026

"You ascended before our eyes, and we turned back grieving, only to find you in our hearts." (Augustine of Hippo)

Read Acts 1:1–11 and Luke 24:50–53

These passages represent the only two contemporary descriptions of the Ascension. Luke's structure is similar for both. There is a post-resurrection period of teaching by Jesus for the first disciples – probably the wider grouping we can understand from Luke 24:33 or Acts 1:14. This lasts 40 days in the account in Acts, and for an indeterminate time in the gospel. Jesus then ascends and disappears from their sight. As the disciples see it, he is literally returning to heaven. **Given that Jesus had just left, why do you think that the disciples returned to Jerusalem "with great joy"?** Though these are the only eye-witness accounts, other New Testament writers seem to assume it having happened and also move on to its consequences. It is on the latter aspect that I want to concentrate this week.

But firstly, why did Jesus 'go up'? Quite simply because that's where the disciples knew heaven to be: above the firmament. You may want to look back to the diagram of their view of the cosmos I included with the notes two weeks ago.

Jesus had to ascend so as to fit the disciples' understanding of heaven's location. **Where do you think heaven is? What differentiates it from other place or space?**

How do ideas of God being everywhere, all the time (omnipresence) help, hinder or change your understanding of this?

Read Hebrews 4:14–16

This section opens with the idea that Jesus, having ascended becomes the "*great high priest*." A key aspect is that, as high priest, Jesus was and still is one with us. He can sympathise with our weaknesses. After all, he was tested just as we are. It is through this that we can approach the throne of grace with confidence. **How confident do you feel? If not, what would help?**

Paul, in the passages from Ephesians that we read on Sunday notes that the Father has both "*raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms*". Being seated at the right hand of God is again a sign that the work is complete. (Hebrews 10:12). Tom Wright notes that "*only ascended does Jesus clear the way for a new heaven and earth reality in which God will dwell with his people forever.*"

Jesus has, we might say, taken on the mantle of the earthly priesthood, indeed of the whole Temple worship system. Again, Tom Wright notes that, historically, the Temple had been seen as the point at which heaven and earth were joined. The Ascension now sees Jesus take up that position. If the writer of Hebrews is showing that Jesus – now ascended – overturns all the Old Testament temple sacrifice requirements, **what effect does that have on our reading of the Old Testament?**

It's a phrase I've used before, but as we consider the Ascension, we can see that Jesus represents humanity within the Godhead and next week as we experience Pentecost, we may, I hope, see how the Holy Spirit represents the Godhead within humanity.