

Life: Ascended like no other

March 29, 2015

The Bible Studies for Life lesson for April 12 focuses on Acts 1:3-11.

After his resurrection, Jesus proved he was alive by appearing to numerous people—in addition to the women at the tomb—during the 40 days before his ascension. He spoke with Simon Peter on the day of his resurrection (Luke 24:34). He walked with Cleopas and his friend on their way to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-25).

He appeared in the upper room with his disciples at least twice and said to them: “Touch me and see. For a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have” (John 20:19-24; John 20:26-28; Luke 24:39). He grilled fish for Peter, Thomas, Nathanael, James and John at the seashore (John 21:1-23). He appeared to more than 500 men at once in Galilee (1Corinthians 15:6). Jesus made sure his followers knew he was alive.

Impatient, fearful disciples

The last time they met together, Jesus told his disciples not to leave Jerusalem until they were “baptized” with the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:5). Impatient and perplexed, the disciples asked, “Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?” (v. 6). Surely now was the time since Jesus obviously had achieved victory over death. The apostles’ interest in the restoration of the kingdom of Israel on earth is understandable. Remember, they have spent more than a month fearing for their lives in the aftermath of Jesus’ arrest and crucifixion.

The apostles naturally are anxious for their resurrected Messiah to proclaim his earthly kingdom, thus offering them security and victory. However, Jesus reminds them, “It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority” (v. 7). Jesus will give them the

power to be the kind of witnesses he wants them to be “in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth” (v. 8).

Proof through the Holy Spirit

This waiting period was critical because the disciples were not to work in their own power, but through the power of the Spirit Christ would send after his ascension. Only after the apostles received the Spirit would they be able to share the gospel effectively to the ends of the earth, starting with Jerusalem.

The rest of the book of Acts offers proof the Holy Spirit did empower the disciples. In Jesus’ name, the apostles healed people of disease, exorcised evil spirits and raised the dead. At Pentecost, the Holy Spirit descended on thousands of new believers, and the early church began to take shape and grow.

None of this could happen until Jesus left the earth. Christians do not emphasize the ascension of Jesus as much as his birth or resurrection. However, it is a catalyzing event for the institution of the church as God’s vehicle for accomplishing his mission to redeem the world. Fittingly, Jesus’ departure to heaven is as dramatic as his birth into the world was humble.

His apostles witness his physical lifting into the sky until a cloud hides him from their sight. Then an angel appears to those staring up at the sky and asks what they are looking at. “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” (v. 11). When Jesus returns as King, we will see him descending from heaven. There will be no doubt the time for the “new Jerusalem” has come (Revelation 21:2).

Historical support

According to Jim Denison, founder of the [Denison Forum on Truth and](#)

[Culture](#), validation of Jesus' death, resurrection and ascension is provided by secular historical resources as well as biblical (See ["Get Ready for Christmas Attacks on Christ,"](#) Nov. 1, 2013). In 52 A.D., for example, the Roman historian Thallus the Samaritan describes a "solar eclipse" at the time of Jesus' crucifixion.

In 120 A.D., Tacitus described Jesus' death in detail. More than 2,000 years later, Jesus' corpse never has been found, even though it would be "the single greatest evidence enemies of the faith could claim," according to Denison. After all, a corpse would mean Jesus' body did not ascend to heaven, though Scripture clearly says it did. Indeed, there is no corpse. Jesus is alive, bodily ascended into heaven, seated at the right hand of the Father. This fact of a resurrected Savior is the message we, as his followers, are privileged to tell.