



Thu 1 May Matthew 28:16 - 20 The Ascension

Naomi Starkey writes...

We begin this issue of *New Daylight* with the first of what will be an annual set of readings: Bible passages reflecting themes relevant to the ascension of Jesus to heaven and the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. For this year, Jennifer Oldroyd has chosen readings from the Gospels and from Acts to explore what she describes as 'the first chapter of the next instalment' of God's dealings with us.

Following on immediately after Jennifer's readings, I am pleased to have Stephen Rand writing two weeks on 'Israel in God's purposes', a topic suggested by a *New Daylight* reader some time ago. As Stephen points out in his introduction, 'Most preachers know that if they want a quiet life, Israel is a topic best avoided', but if we do that, we can end up failing to appreciate our own Jewish heritage as Christians, as well as losing sight of much that is key to understanding the Bible as a whole and the Old Testament in particular.

As well as Stephen's wide-ranging notes, we have a couple of sets of readings taking an in-depth look at key verses or figures in Church history. Margaret Silf considers the 'I am' sayings of Jesus - familiar Gospel verses in which Jesus helps his friends and followers to grasp a little more of who he is and what he came to bring the world. Rachel Boulding spends a week with St Richard of Chichester, choosing passages from across the Bible that echo themes from his life and from the well-loved prayer ascribed to him.

In putting together this issue, I had a new and somewhat uncomfortable experience. As you may notice from the contents page, I have become a contributor as well as editor - and I realized just how much hard work goes into writing Bible reading notes! After more than six years of dishing out tough assignments to my contributor team, chasing them if they were late with their text and then asking them to redo bits that I judged in need of improvement, I found myself in their shoes (or at their desk) and I was humbled to realize the amount of effort involved.

So I'll finish with three cheers for *New Daylight* contributors, past and present, and a big thank you, once again, to all who write in to encourage us as we continue with our ministry here at BRF.

Introduction

When the Spirit came

Do you ever daydream about what it would be like if Jesus walked the earth today? Do you ever wonder what he would do - in your neighbourhood, church, home - if he could be physically present?

Sometimes it is so hard to walk in faith and know Jesus only through the scriptures. We are human beings with physical senses and needs. Sometimes we long for him to be here today, to heal and teach and encourage us, rather than just have the promise of his eternal presence in the hereafter.

If that is how we feel today, how much harder it must have been for the disciples as they adjusted to life without Jesus' physical presence. They had known him and loved him. They had followed him and listened to him. After the trauma of his death, they knew the wonder of seeing his face once again, having recognized him in the breaking of bread. They had shared a beach picnic with him and been startled by his sudden appearance as they met together. For six weeks they had got used to this new, amazing, risen Jesus. Then he left.

They stood on the hillside, blinded by the white robes of the angels and their own tears, and faced the prospect that they would not be able to see him, hear him or touch him again. Apart from their memories of the physical Jesus, they

then became like us and like all the other disciples from that time to this.

Why did he have to go? Why can he not be present in the world, to build his Church and establish his kingdom? Why does it have to be like this?

For the answers to these questions, we are going to look at what Jesus taught his disciples about the Holy Spirit in John's Gospel. Then we are going to consider the story of the coming of the Holy Spirit in Acts and, finally, still in Acts, we will look at some of the experiences of the apostles in those first few amazing years after Pentecost.

Why were these words and events recorded? So that we and all who follow after can learn what God has ushered in with the death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus. As you begin this next couple of weeks' readings, pray that God the Father will open your eyes to new truths and the amazing things that became possible 'when the Spirit came'.

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Matthew 28:16 - 20 (NRSV) **The Ascension**

Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. And Jesus came and said to them, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.'

Each of the Gospels describes Jesus' final moments on earth differently. Here, Jesus tells his disciples that all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to him and then he says, 'Go therefore...'. Because he has all authority, because he is King of kings and Lord of lords, those who follow him are to turn outwards to the world and 'make disciples of all nations'.

No matter how we came to faith and no matter what our character and gifts, we all share in that commission. You may be called to leave your country and go in a literal sense. Even if you are housebound or have heavy family responsibilities, though, you cannot escape Jesus' command to 'go' - that is, turn your heart to others and draw them towards the love of God. Over the next two weeks, we shall discover that the ascension is not the last chapter of the first part of God's amazing story. Rather, it is the first chapter of the next instalment. Now that Jesus has returned to his Father, the Holy Spirit can be poured out on all God's people. The disciples still had no idea what was going to happen and some still had doubts, but, as instructed, they waited and prayed. Maybe as they did so they began to piece together the amazing things Jesus had said about how life would be 'when the Spirit came'. We, too, will go back over Jesus' words in John's Gospel so that, whether we are worshippers or doubters, we can understand God's purposes for the next instalment of his great story.

Prayer

Risen Lord Jesus, we too want to worship you in your ascended glory. We pray for a new understanding of the work of your Spirit in our lives and in our world. Amen

Jennifer Oldroyd
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