

No One Has Ascended

Addendum to the study “Where are the Dead?”

*Compiled by Rachel Cory-Kuehl, February 2015
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Scripture from the NKJV unless otherwise noted.*

John 3:13 [Christ speaking to Nicodemus] “No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven, that is, the Son of Man who is in heaven.”

No one - living at that time, on the earth - had ever ascended to heaven and returned to give a report concerning that place. This is the simple interpretation.

Some teachers interpret Christ’s statement to mean that no human being, at any time since the creation, had ever ascended into the heavenly realm. This would mean that Enoch, Moses, Elijah were still sleeping in death, and are not alive in Heaven.

Those who teach this interpretation do not preclude all resurrection. The son of the widow of Zarephath, was restored to life through the prayer of Elijah (*1Ki 17:17-24*). Christ Himself raised Jarius’ daughter (*Matt 9:24*), and Lazarus (*John 11:43*), and the widow’s only son (*Lk 7:15*). Hebrews 11:35, says “women received their dead raised to life again.” But these were raised to continued physical life. They were not - so far as we know, transported to the Heavenly realm.

Let’s take a closer look at this passage.

“No one has ascended to heaven.”

Travel to heaven is described in Scripture as going “up.” The word *ascend* means “to go up.” To reach heaven one must ascend from earth to a “higher” place. Angels descend to earth and return to heaven, so we might assume that when Christ said “no one has ascended,” He was excluding only human beings, not heavenly beings. Concerning the children, He said, “their angels always behold the face of my Father in heaven” (*Matt. 18:10*).

"No one has seen God at any time" (*Jn 1:18*).

"Not that anyone has seen the Father, except He who is from God'; He has seen the Father" (*Jn 6:46*).

If angels always behold the face of the Father in heaven, then it would seem these two statements also apply to humans only (exclusive of Christ), and perhaps only to humans while they live on the earth, in mortal physical bodies

Matthew 11:27 "All things have been delivered to Me by My Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father. Nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and the one to whom the Son wills to reveal Him."

WHAT ABOUT THE SECOND STATEMENT ?

John 3:13 "The Son of Man who is in heaven"

In what sense was Jesus Christ "in heaven" when He spoke these words? He was not in a different *physical* location. We would have to interpret His statement in a spiritual sense.

"I am not alone, but I am with the Father who sent Me" (*Jn 8:16, Jn. 16:32*).

The essence then, of being "in heaven" would be a perfect one-ness with the Father, and a perfect awareness of the Father's presence, and the Father's mind. Yeshua said that He was "in the bosom of the Father" (*Jn. 1:18*). "I am in the Father and the Father in me" (*Jn. 14:10-11*). The spirit of His Father indwelt Him fully and "without measure" (*Jn 3:34*). In this sense, He *was* "in heaven." No other being - neither angel nor man, had ever ascended to this place of perfect oneness with God.

John 6:62 "What then if you should see the Son of Man ascend where He was before?"

Where was He "before" - before His incarnation?

Jesus prayed, "Father ... glorify me with the glory that I had with You before the world was" (*John 17:5*).

Before He descended into human form and nature, He shared the Father's glory. He *was* at the right hand of His Father, prior to His incarnation. He descended into human nature, in order to reveal the Father to men (*Mat. 11:27*). He would ascend back to His Father's right hand (*Acts 2:33, Mk 16:19, Col. 3:1*). His divine glory and power would be restored.

The disciples would “see” this event - only by faith. Only Christ has “ascended” to this place “within the Father’s glory.” No one else!

Psalm 24:3-4 “Who may ascend into the hill of the LORD? Or who may stand in His holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart . . .”

The description fits only one Being - Jesus the Christ. Only Christ “has clean hands and a pure heart.” He is the only One who could, or had, “ascended” into the very heart of God.

1 Timothy 6:14 “ . . . keep this command without spot or blame until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ, which God will bring about in his own time-- God, the blessed and only Ruler, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone is immortal and who lives in unapproachable light, whom no one has seen or can see. To him be honor and might forever. Amen.

Jesus our LORD came from *this* “unapproachable light.”

Enoch, Elijah and Moses may have been transported into the heavenly dimension, but still never have entered the “unapproachable light.”

John 20:17 “Jesus said to her, ‘Do not cling to Me, for I have not yet ascended to My Father; but go to My brethren and say to them, “I am ascending to My Father and your Father, and to My God and your God.”’”

We could take this verse out of context and say that Christ had never before existed in the presence of God His Father. Some folks who teach that Christ had no pre-existence use it that way. They have to ignore His own statements in *John 3:13, and 17:5*. The only One who *had* ascended into the heart of the Father, was the One who descended from heaven to men.

There is yet another meaning of the word “descended” as applied to the Son of God.

Ephesians 4:9-10 “(Now this, “He ascended” -- what does it mean but that He also first descended into the lower parts of the earth? He who descended is also the One who ascended far above all the heavens, that He might fill all things.”

He “emptied himself,” descending from glorious divine power to take upon Himself human nature. He left the glorious presence of God His Father, to walk dusty roads and sleep under trees. Then He descended from oneness with God His Father, to be treated as one “cut off” (*Phil. 2:5-8*). Finally, He descended into the grave.

Let’s review.

John 3:13 No man then living on the earth, had ascended into heaven to bring back a report of God or of heaven. No man had ever entered the “unapproachable light” which surrounds the Father. No man had yet “seen the Father.” No one shared the Father’s glory. No one had been “one” with the Father, except The Son.

Only the Son of God came down from heaven to “reveal the Father” to men. Only the Son of God knew the heart of His Father fully and intimately.

“If you have seen me, you have seen the Father” (*Jn. 14:9*).

To explain it simply, I believe that Jesus was trying to tell Nicodemus just who He was. He was “the One sent” from God - the prophet like Moses - the Messiah.

Back to our question concerning John 3:13. Does this verse mean there are no living human beings in heaven now?

Hebrews 11:5 “Enoch was translated so that he did not see death.”

Those who want to say that there are no human beings in heaven now, say that Enoch was simply moved from one place to another, on the earth, so that he did not die at that time. He died later. I think that’s adding to the text.

Romans 5:14 “Death reigned from Adam to Moses.”

Which begs the question. What changed with Moses?

Answer: Moses was the first person ever to be resurrected! Why argue with Satan over the body (*Jude 1:9*), unless you want to resurrect this man? Just leave the body where it is.

I believe that Moses was resurrected by the Son of God shortly after he was buried, and was taken to heaven. He appeared later on the Mount of Transfiguration, talking with Christ.

2 Kings 2:11 Elijah went “up into heaven” in a fiery chariot.

He apparently never died. Again, the folks urging a blanket death-sleep for all until the Second Coming, say that Elijah was simply moved from one place to another on the earth, and later died.

Elijah and Moses appeared, talking with Christ on the mount of the transfiguration (*Matt. 17:3*). Why only these two men? Why not include Enoch as well. Answer: Only two witnesses were needed, according to the Law (*Deut 17:6*). Jesus knew this, and he would have accepted their word as heavenly testimony.

Matthew 27:51-52 "And the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised; and coming out of the graves after his resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many."

Many dead saints were raised by Christ, after He was raised by His Father. These people went into the city of Jerusalem, and were seen there. If these people did not ascend with Christ when He returned to heaven, then where did they go, and what happened to them? This is the only mention of them in Scripture, unless of course you believe these people became the "twenty-four elders" of Rev. Cpt 4-5. The twenty-four elders are from "all nations, kindreds, tongues and peoples." Where would they belong, if they had to remain on the earth? They were not all Jews. I personally believe they ascended with Christ, and He presented them before His Father's throne as the "Spring Harvest." Christ Himself was the "Firstfruits" of that harvest.

HOW COULD THE LORD GIVE IMMORTALITY BEFORE THE PRICE WAS PAID?

Some teach that no human being could have been granted release from death or escape from death before Christ paid the price for their forgiveness. I believe that the God of heaven (who sees the future) treated the promise of His Son as accomplished fact. To the Father it was as if He had already died on that cross. Does this mean that every person of faith is immediately granted release from death. No. Most will wait to be awakened from their sleep when Christ returns (*Dan. 12:2-3*).

WHY THE EXCEPTIONS?

First: I believe it is because God's law says that no one may be executed without the testimony of at least two human witnesses. Those who were granted escape from death or earthly life, will serve as witnesses of God's just judgment. Second: God knew that the words of Moses and Elijah (two witnesses) would strengthen His Son before His ordeal. If those words can ever be shared, I personally look forward to hearing just what they said.

FORBIDDEN

Moses appeared with Elijah, talking with Christ on the Mount of Transfiguration. The account is in Matthew Cpt 17, and Mark Cpt 9.

It was FORBIDDEN for any man of Israel to speak with the dead. It was a death penalty offense under the Law. No wonder Jesus told them not to tell anyone what they had seen! The Jews would have stoned him - just for this supposed violation of Torah. And the disciples would certainly have rejected Jesus as Messiah, if they believed that He had spoken with dead persons.

The disciples knew the Law. Some versions quote Jesus as saying, “Tell no man the vision.” Others translate simply, “Tell no one what you have seen.”

Did Jesus sin?

Did He violate a Torah command?

Did He speak with “the dead?”

Answer: No! **Jesus committed no sin because Moses and Elijah were ALIVE.**

Some say this was a “vision.” Then why did Jesus take 3 witnesses with Him? Peter, James, and John all “saw” what took place. If it was a “vision” then 3 men had simultaneous identical visions. There is no other account in the Bible of such an occurrence.

The three disciple witnesses of the transfiguration, wanted to set up “three tabernacles” - one for Christ, one for Moses, and one for Elijah. Sounds like they believed the prophets were actually alive and present.

See 2 Cor. 3:1; Matt. 18:16, 1 Timothy 5:19, and Hebrews 10:28 for examples of this principle of “witnesses.”

Here is Peter’s first person witness account.

2 Peter 1:16-18 “For we did not follow cunningly devised fables . . . but were eyewitnesses of His majesty. For He received from God the Father honor and glory when such a voice came to Him from the Excellent Glory: ‘This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.’ And we heard this voice which came from heaven when we were with Him on the holy mountain.”

*We pray this study will prove a blessing.
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