

Apostolic Copy-Cats Acts 1:9 – 14

I. The Apostles See

In verses 9-11 it mentions some form of looking word six different times: “watched”, “sight”, “gazed” (2x’s), “behold”, “saw”. The word “behold” may be intended for the reader to behold what Luke was writing; nevertheless it is intended for us to see what the Apostles saw. The emphasis on watching and gazing in these two verses is also demonstrated in the outline that I have provided. (See page on Background Work.) The central theme (C section) focuses on Christ being taken out of their “sight” as they “gazed” upward toward the heaven. Also this outline begins with them watching, and ends with the angels asking why they are gazing (A sections). The angels use the phrase “into the heaven” (the definite article is used) three times. The first and third phrase speak of the Apostles’ “gazing” and the fact they “saw” Christ go up.

One critical scholar that I’ve read suggested that the words “they watched” in verse 9 “overloads the sentence and should be omitted”. This is very helpful for us because we should also learn by *antithesis*. When ‘scholars’ suggest that certain words overload a sentence, and should be omitted, then we should do the exact opposite. We should let those words overload our thoughts and our reading of the verse. In this way we will be letting Luke’s written emphasis impact us.

Luke wants us to know that the Apostles were eyewitnesses of Jesus’ resurrection. This is why he has “overloaded” these verses with various looking or watching words. Eyewitnessing the Lord Jesus Christ was the mark of Apostleship, which even the Apostle Paul would appeal to, in defense of his own apostolic position in the church.

Paul’s vision of Jesus, and being taught by Jesus, authorized him to be an Apostle on equal terms with these eleven who witnessed the ascension. “*For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but it came through the revelation of Jesus Christ*” (Gal. 1:12). Paul appealed to his eyewitness revelation of the ascended Lord to counteract the slanderous heretics who infiltrated the Galatian churches. Hitting them hard with a long worded single thought phrase Paul introduced the letter saying, “*Paul, and Apostle (not-from-men-nor-through-man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father who raised Him from the dead)*”. (I capitalized “Apostle” and placed the hyphen s in the translation, seeking to capture the singular emphasis of the divine authority of his Apostleship.)

II. The Cloud Receives

This passage says that “*a cloud received Him out of their sight*” (v.9). This does not mean that it was simply a partly cloudy day over the city of Jerusalem. The cloud represents the presence of God. We know this because of the numerous times that a cloud represented God’s presence in the Bible. On Mt Sinai, at day time in the wilderness, the incense cloud in the Holy of Holies, the clouds of heaven in Daniel 7, and even the cloud on the Mount of Transfiguration – were all representations of the presence of God. Therefore, for “a cloud” to receive Jesus means that the presence of God, the throne room of God received Him. In Revelation 4-5, John has a vision of what it was like in heaven after Jesus ascended. All the arch-angels, singing angels, and all of

creation began to praise the Lord who came sit on His throne. Daniel 7:9 comments on John's vision, *after* He ascended on the cloud mentioned in Acts 1. "*I watched till thrones were put in place, and the Ancient of Days was seated; His garment was white as snow, and the hair of His head was like pure wool. His throne was a fiery flame, its wheels a burning fire; a fiery stream issued and came forth from before Him. A thousand thousands ministered to Him; ten thousand times ten thousand stood before Him. The court was seated, and the books were opened*" (Dan.7:9-10).

II. The Apostles Do (v.12-13)

The Apostles traveled from Mt. Olivet back to Jerusalem, which was a distance of "a Sabbath day's journey." Some understand the Biblical regulation of a Sabbath day's journey to come from Ex. 16:29-30, where the Israelites were commanded on the Sabbath day to "let every man remain in his place; let no man go out of his place on the seventh day." Considering the distance from the tents of the people to the tabernacle in the wilderness, this distance was assumed to be about 1000 yards. But of course Luke may have more in mind more than just the *distance* from Jerusalem to Mt. Olivet.

John Phillips writes, "The reference (of a Sabbath day's journey) is also the tolling of the bell over Judaism and what it had become. Soon all such Sabbath questions would be swept away, and the church would choose a new day for worship – the first day of the week, the day of resurrection."¹ I think this commentator is definitely on to something, and let me add to his train of thought.

The fact that Mt. Olive and Jerusalem were just one Sabbath day's journey apart is bound to have theological significance for Luke. Most commentaries that I've read, especially critical commentaries, see that Luke is doing nothing more than simply using an old Jewish term for calculating the walking distance between two points. For example, "A *Sabbath day's journey* was about 1.2 km (3/4 mile); the expression is a Jewish one, and is not meant to imply that the event took place on a Sabbath. The point is rather that the ascension took place in the near vicinity of Jerusalem."²

It is certainly true that Jesus ascended near Jerusalem, yet this is certainly not all the truth that Luke wants us to see. We should remember that the actions of the Apostles represent their theology, just as much as Jesus' actions communicated the substance of who He was during His earthly ministry. Therefore, let's consider the depth of meaning that Luke, through the Holy Spirit, is presenting to his readers.

1. East

First, Mt. Olive is *east* of Jerusalem. In the same way, Adam and Eve, and their posterity moved east from Eden, anticipating a new work of God. Even so Christ and the Apostles moved east from the Old Jerusalem, building upon the New Covenant and leaving behind the old. The Old Jerusalem was the "garden" of the Old Covenant "Eden" Therefore, it was time for the Jews to "move east", to leave behind the Old Covenant, and to join Christ and His Apostles.

¹ *Exploring Acts: an expository commentary*, by John Phillips, pg. 24.

² *The Acts of the Apostles: an introduction and commentary*, by I. Howard Marshall, pg.12.

2. *Two Mountains*

Jerusalem is commonly called Mt. Zion, yet Jesus ascended just to the east of it, from Mt. Olivet. Building upon the theme of maturity by eastward movement, we also see Luke emphasis both Mt. Zion and Mt. Olivet in verse 12. You'll notice on my "Background Work Page" Luke writes back and forth in verse 12 identifying both of these locations. Every phrase in verse twelve has at least some implicit reference to one of these mountains: either Mt. Zion or Mt. Olivet.

By Luke saying the distance between these two is "a Sabbath day's journey", and knowing that Mt. Olivet is located eastward, we should notice the theological point and progression that Luke is articulating to us.

Old Mt. Zion is the Old Covenant. The mountain of Jesus' ascension, Mt. Olivet, is the New Covenant. The distance between these two is one Sabbath day. If the Jews would accept the Lord's Day of Resurrection, as the new and true Sabbath, then they would mature and move eastward to the New Covenant Mountain: Mt. Olivet. Or, we could see that the Old Covenant Sabbaths are all over. They have died in Christ, just as Jesus was dead during Saturday: the Jewish Sabbath. The new creation, post-Sabbath world, came to light in His resurrection. The Jews have a Sabbath-journey to go through in Jesus' death and resurrection, to reach the new mountain top of the New Covenant.³

These typological interpretations are the only explanation I have for why Luke "overloads" verse 12 with the following points. 1) His writing literally vacillates back and forth from Jerusalem to Mt. Olivet. 2) He mentions the city of Jerusalem twice. And reflecting a twice mentioning of Mt. Olivet, he gives the name of Mt. Olivet and the distance from it. 3) Finally, *knowing* that the New Covenant has been inaugurated with Jesus' resurrection, he identifies the distance between these two mountains with an outdated Jewish term: a Sabbath day's journey. Unless these three observations are intended to have no theological significance, which as an assumption that no Bible student should have, then I think my explanation is a legitimate reckoning of the loaded material in the verse, especially the *way* Luke loaded it. If more justification is need for my explanation, then notice verse 13.

3. *Two Ascensions*

After they entered Jerusalem (old Mt. Zion) the Apostles continue to "ascend" into the upper room. This word for "went up" is a word used for Jesus' ascension in other passages (Eph.4:8, Rom.10:6). Considering that Jesus has just ascended into heaven, verse 13 is telling us of a second ascension. The action of Jesus is reflected in the action of the Apostles.

Remember, Jesus' act of ascending beyond the heavenly firmament illustrates the act of God's kingdom transcending beyond all earthly barriers. Even so Jesus' ascended *location* illustrates the significance of why the disciples ascend to their *location* in the Upper Room. Just as Moses' tabernacle was a copy of what he saw on Mt. Sinai, the Apostle's copy what they saw on Mt. Olivet. Simply put: the Apostles literally ascending into the Upper Room reflects Jesus' physical ascension into the Upper Room of heaven's throne.

This does not contradict the Old Covenant typology of Mt. Zion that I've mentioned in section three. If I may continue with that train of thought, the Apostles

³ This last thought of a post-Sabbath world is based on a correspondence with James Jordan.

have returned to Jerusalem to lead the way. They are leading a new exodus, eastward, to the New Covenant Mountain. They will very soon call the Jews to forsake the Old Covenant and join the new Israel of God – that heavenly Mt. Zion illustrated verse 12 by Mt. Olivet from where Jesus ascended. Yet, sadly many Jews will reject that new Sabbath day of Jesus’ resurrection, thus failing to take the “Sabbath day’s journey” to the New Covenant.

4. *No Distinctions*

Since the Upper Room was a symbol of Jesus’ heavenly location, and the Apostles having that heavenly identity, we see the significance of the women praying with the Apostles. The Old Covenant made spiritual distinctions (not functional distinctions) between men and women. Men could come closer to the Holy of Holies than women. And women were never allowed to be a priest who come enter in once a year.

Yet with the New Covenant in Christ, both men and women are now in the heavenly Holy of Holies. The Old Covenant veil as been rent in two. Access to the heavenly cloud, the throne room of grace, and to Him who sits enthroned on the praise of angels – that location is where God’s New Covenant people dwell. For this reason Paul says “*There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus*” (Gal. 3:28).

Observations & Applications:

1. In the listing of the 11 Apostles in verse 13, the Greek word for “and” (*kai*) is mentioned 7 times. Though they will choose another to replace Judas, the 7-fold mention of “and” makes me think of the perfection and completion that they have in Christ; and as authentic Apostles of the Lord. Though they were lacked a 12th, they are still the complete seed of the Apostolic kingdom, as we saw in 1:1-3.

2. Apostles mimicking, or imitating Jesus’ actions, like going into an upper room, does not set a precedent of what we should do. We are not to build churches on the top story of every building. Their imitating of Christ in this way communicated the *doctrine* of the church, and the identity of the church, not necessarily the way the church should function everyday, or on a weekly basis. Wherever we meet to pray and worship God, we are meeting in the upper room of heaven with Christ. Apostolic actions are to be applied to us by what their actions *teach* us. Yet, learning from their upper room experience does not mean we should elevate our church ten feet off the ground. Notice the flow of the arrows below: action leads to doctrine. This is why Peter’s action in Galatians 2 was so sinful. His action taught the wrong doctrine. To some extent the same principle applies to all of us – but not in issues like finding an upper room to meet in.

Jesus’ *action* —————> Apostles *actions* —————> Church’s *doctrine*