

THE FORTY DAYS · POST FOUR OF FOUR · SERIES FINALE

POST 1

A City That Did Not Know*Days 1–8 · Jerusalem · Thomas*

POST 2

The Shore at Dawn*Days 9–20 · Galilee · Peter*

POST 3

The Kingdom in the Margins*Acts 1:3 · The Commission*

POST 4

The Hill and the Hands*Day 40 · Ascension · Series Finale*

The Hill and the Hands

The Last Day Before Heaven · The Blessing · The Cloud · “Why Do You Stand Looking Into Heaven?”

Day 40 · The Mount of Olives · Acts 1:1–14 · The Ascension

Luke 24:50–52 (ESV)

“And he led them out as far as Bethany, and lifting up his hands he blessed them. While he blessed them, he parted from them and was carried up into heaven. And they worshipped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy.”

THE SETTING · DAY 40

Coming Back to the City Where It All Happened

Somewhere in the final days of the forty, Jesus gathered his disciples and led them back toward Jerusalem. They had been in Galilee — the lake, the mountain of the Great Commission, the familiar hillsides where most of them had grown up. Now, for the last time, they walked south and approached the city that had crucified their Lord forty days before.

Jerusalem had not changed. The Temple still stood. The Sanhedrin still sat. Caiaphas was still High Priest. The same chief priests who had orchestrated the arrest were still in their positions. And into that city — the city of the trial and the cross and the empty tomb — Jesus brought eleven men he had spent forty days rebuilding and told them to wait.

“The location was deliberate. Jerusalem was not where the disciples were comfortable. It was where they were afraid. But it was where the story had to begin — because it was where the cross had happened, where the tomb had been found empty, and where the prophets had said the word of the Lord would go forth.”

KNOWLEDGE CHECK · Q1

Why did Jesus specifically send the disciples back to Jerusalem rather than letting them stay in Galilee to begin the mission?

- A. It was the largest city, so the biggest audience
- B. It was where the cross happened, the tomb was empty, witnesses were concentrated, and the prophets said the word of God would go forth from there**
- C. The Holy Spirit could only be given in Jerusalem because of the Temple
- D. The disciples needed to confront the Sanhedrin directly

✓ **Answer: B — It was where the cross happened, the tomb was empty, witnesses were concentrated, and the prophets said the word of God would go forth from there | Isaiah 2:3 · Acts 1:4**

THE LAST QUESTION

What the Final Question Reveals About the Disciples — and About Us

Acts 1:6 records the last question the disciples asked before the Ascension. After forty days of teaching. After the cross, the resurrection, the locked rooms, the lakeside breakfast, the Great Commission. After all of it — their final question was still:

Acts 1:6–8

“Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?” He said: “It is not for you to know times or seasons... But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses... to the ends of the earth.”

The disciples were not foolish. They were asking a legitimate question rooted in centuries of genuine scriptural expectation. What was wrong was not the hope itself but the frame: they were still asking *when will this happen to us, for us, in our timeframe?* Jesus turned the frame entirely around. Not *when*. But *what*. Not the timing of a restoration. But the shape of a mission.

“The disciples were not asking the wrong question because they were faithless. They were asking it because they were human. Jesus did not correct their hope — he enlarged it beyond anything they could have requested.”

KNOWLEDGE CHECK · Q2

Jesus's response to the disciples' question about restoring Israel was to:

- A. Confirm it would happen within their lifetime
- B. Tell them the question was wrong and they should stop hoping for restoration
- C. Redirect from timeline to mission — from 'when' to 'what will you do'**
- D. Ignore the question and change the subject

✓ Answer: C — Redirect from timeline to mission — from 'when' to 'what will you do' | Acts 1:7–8 — Not the timing of a restoration but the shape of a mission

THE PLACE

The Mountain That Carries Everything

The ascension happened on the Mount of Olives, near Bethany — a mountain saturated with the story of Jesus and with prophetic significance. If you were going to choose anywhere in the world for the final departure of the Son of God, you could not have chosen more deliberately.

<p>Palm Sunday Matthew 21</p> <hr/> <p>Jesus descended this mountain on a donkey, the disciples shouting “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.” Forty days later, the Ascension began from the same hillside.</p>	<p>Gethsemane Luke 22</p> <hr/> <p>The oil press on the western slope of this same mountain. Where Jesus said “not my will but yours be done.” The mountain witnessed both his greatest submission and his greatest exaltation.</p>	<p>The Olivet Discourse Matthew 24</p> <hr/> <p>Sitting on this ridge, Jesus described his return ‘on the clouds of heaven.’ Now, from this ridge, he left into a cloud. The disciples had heard the prophecy on the same mountain where it began its fulfilment.</p>	<p>Zechariah's Prophecy Zech 14:4</p> <hr/> <p>“On that day his feet will stand on the Mount of Olives.’ The angels at the Ascension echoed this: “He will come back in the same way you saw him go.” He left from this mountain. He will return to this mountain.</p>
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TRUE OR FALSE · ROUND 1

1. The ascension happened in Galilee, near the Sea of Tiberias

✗ FALSE — Luke 24:50, Acts 1:12 — it happened on the Mount of Olives near Bethany, outside Jerusalem

2. Zechariah 14:4 prophesied that the Messiah's feet would stand on the Mount of Olives

✓ TRUE — Written ~500 years before the Ascension — the angels at the Ascension echoed this promise

3. The Gethsemane garden was on a different mountain from where the Ascension occurred

✗ FALSE — Gethsemane was on the western slope of the same Mount of Olives

4. Jesus gave the Olivet Discourse — about his return on the clouds — sitting on the same ridge from which he ascended

✓ TRUE — Matthew 24 — he described his cloud return from the same mountain where the cloud took him

THE MOMENT

The Blessing, the Lifting, the Cloud

Luke's account of the Ascension is the most economical narrative in the whole Passion-Resurrection story. He tells it in two verses in his Gospel and three in Acts. The restraint is striking. There are no words for this moment.

Jesus led them out to the mountain. He lifted up his hands. He blessed them. While he was *still* blessing — while his hands were raised, while the words of blessing were still being spoken — he parted from them and was carried up into heaven. The departure happened *during* the blessing, not after it was complete.

“Lifting up his hands...”

Luke 24:50–52 · Day 40 · The Last Image of the Earthly Jesus

The departure happened *during* the blessing — not after it was complete. The last thing the disciples saw of Jesus in his earthly form was his hands raised over them in benediction, lifted upward as he was lifted. The hands that had broken bread and healed ears and washed feet and shown wounds to Thomas were the last image they carried from the Mount of Olives.

Luke 24:52: They worshipped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy. Not grief. Not confusion. Great joy. Because they understood: the blessing had not ended when he left. The ascended Christ is not an absent Christ. He always lives to make intercession — the ongoing, perpetual, priestly benediction over the people he formed, sent, and promised to return to.

Acts 1:9

“He was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight.” — In the Hebrew tradition, cloud was the ancient symbol of divine presence: the cloud that led Israel through the wilderness, that filled the Tabernacle, that covered Sinai when God spoke. When Jesus entered a cloud, this was the Son of Man entering the presence of the Father — as Daniel had described six centuries before (Daniel 7:13–14). The Ascension was not an ending. It was a coronation.

KNOWLEDGE CHECK · Q3**What was significant about Jesus blessing the disciples while being taken up?**

- A. It meant the blessing was incomplete and would need to be repeated at Pentecost
- B. The departure happened during the blessing — the last image the disciples had was his hands raised in benediction, still blessing as he was lifted**
- C. It was a farewell gesture with no special theological meaning
- D. Only the disciples present on that day received the blessing

✓ **Answer: B — The departure happened during the blessing — the last image the disciples had was his hands raised in benediction, still blessing as he was lifted | Luke 24:50–52 — the blessing did not end when he left**

THE ANGEL'S QUESTION

“Why Do You Stand Looking Into Heaven?”

The disciples stood on the hill, staring at the sky. Two men in white appeared beside them — the same messenger-in-white pattern as the empty tomb — and said the words that turned the disciples from witnesses of departure into people with a direction.

Τι ἕστηκατε — “why do you stand.” — Acts 1:11

Perfect tense: “why have you been standing and are still standing?” Not a rebuke of a moment of shock — a redirection of a posture that was becoming a problem. The disciples had been there for a while, fixed in place, rooted to the spot.

The question was not a rebuke. It was an orientation. Not up — forward. Not backward to where he went — outward to where you are being sent. Not gazing at the sky — walking toward Jerusalem. He told you what to do. Stop watching the place he left and go do it.

The angels’ promise — “this same Jesus, who was taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way as you saw him go” — was not comfort for an indefinite absence. It was a specific, directional promise tied to Zechariah 14: the same mountain, the same manner, the same person. The departure was not

abandonment. It was the first movement of a return that was already guaranteed.

MATCH IT UP · CLOUD · MOUNTAIN · RETURN

REFERENCE / TERM	WHAT IT MEANS / ANSWERS
The cloud (Acts 1:9)	Symbol of divine presence — same as the cloud over Sinai and the Tabernacle
Daniel 7:13–14	Son of Man coming on clouds to the Ancient of Days to receive his kingdom
Zechariah 14:4	His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives — the return prophecy
Acts 1:11	He will come back in the same way — bodily, visibly, to the same mountain
Luke 24:52	They returned to Jerusalem with great joy — not grief
Psalms 110:1	Sit at my right hand — the coronation verse quoted most in the NT

THE THEOLOGY

The Six Pillars of the Ascension — The Most Overlooked Doctrine

The Ascension is one of the most neglected doctrines in the modern Church. We celebrate Christmas, Good Friday, Easter. But the Ascension — forty days after Easter, always a Thursday — often passes without a sermon. This is a significant loss, because the Ascension is not a postscript to the resurrection. It is the necessary completion of it.

<p style="text-align: center;">I The Coronation</p> <p>Psalm 110:1 — the most quoted OT verse in the NT. When Jesus ascended he was not simply leaving earth; he was being enthroned at the right hand of the Father to begin his reign. Every moment since, the risen Christ has been ruling — sending the Spirit, interceding, drawing all people to himself.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">II No Ascension, No Pentecost</p> <p>John 16:7: “It is to your advantage that I go away.” His physical departure made his spiritual omnipresence possible. Every believer who has sensed God’s presence, every church that has gathered in his name, every person changed by the Spirit — none of it was possible without the Ascension.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">III Our High Priest at the Throne</p> <p>Hebrews 7:25: “He always lives to make intercession.” At this moment, Jesus is presenting his completed work before the Father on behalf of every believer who has ever lived. He is advocate, mediator, great High Priest who has passed through the heavens.</p>
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IV Human Flesh in Heaven

Jesus went up with his body. The resurrection body — with the marks of the nails — is now at the right hand of the Father. The Incarnation was permanent. Our humanity has been carried all the way to heaven by the one who assumed it. Hebrews 4:15: he sympathises with our weaknesses because he has been there.

V He Will Return the Same Way

Acts 1:11 — bodily, visibly, in a cloud of divine presence, to the same mountain. The Ascension established both the pattern and the promise of the return. The disciples were not supposed to stand and wait — they were supposed to fill the space between Ascension and return with the mission to the ends of the earth.

VI He Prepares a Place

John 14:2–3: “I go to prepare a place for you... that where I am you may be also.” The Ascension was the beginning of this preparatory work. Jesus went ahead — the forerunner, the pioneer — not to abandon his people but to make their ultimate home ready for them. The departure was an act of love.

TRUE OR FALSE · ROUND 2

1. Without the Ascension there would have been no Pentecost

✓ TRUE — John 16:7 — Jesus was explicit: if he did not go away, the Helper would not come

2. The risen, ascended Jesus no longer has his human body

✗ FALSE — The Incarnation was permanent — he ascended bodily and still bears the marks of the nails

3. Hebrews says Jesus ‘always lives to make intercession’ for believers

✓ TRUE — Hebrews 7:25 — his session at the right hand is active priestly intercession, not passive rest

4. The Great Commission’s promise ‘I am with you always’ is only meaningful because Jesus ascended

✓ TRUE — His physical departure made his spiritual omnipresence possible — he is with every believer everywhere

AFTER DAY 40

The Ten Days the World Does Not See

The disciples walked back to Jerusalem. Forty days of resurrection appearances, then the Ascension on Day 40. Ten days until Pentecost — the fiftieth day after Passover. The disciples did not know exactly when the promise would be fulfilled. They knew only to wait in Jerusalem for the Spirit.

120 People Gathered

Acts 1:15

The eleven disciples, Mary, Jesus's brothers (including James, transformed by his resurrection appearance), the women who had been at the cross and the tomb. The first gathering of the Church.

Devoted to Prayer

Acts 1:14

"All these with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer." Not strategising. Not writing mission plans. The mission cannot be prosecuted without the power, and the power requires waiting.

Peter Rises to Lead

Acts 1:15–26

The man who denied Jesus three times cited the Psalms, explained what had happened with Judas, and led the choice of Matthias. The forty days had worked. The broken fisherman had become the shepherd.

Ten days after the Ascension — fifty days after Passover — Jerusalem would be full again with pilgrims from across the empire for the Feast of Weeks. And the Spirit Jesus had promised would come with wind and fire into the upper room, and Peter would preach the first public Christian sermon, and three thousand people would believe in a single day. The ascension had made it possible. The waiting had prepared for it. The fire was coming.

THE WHOLE ARC

What the Forty Days Were For — Six Things They Accomplished**1 Proved the resurrection**

Forty days of "many convincing proofs" — testimony, the strongest evidential language available. The accumulated weight of evidence was the foundation on which the Church was built.

2 Rebuilt broken people

The wounds were opened and healed. The guilt was addressed. The theology was rebuilt. The commission was given and received by people who were ready because they had been prepared.

3 Opened the Scriptures

Luke 24:45. Every text reorganised around the resurrection. The sermons of Acts are the proof: Peter citing Joel and Psalm 110, Philip opening Isaiah 53, Stephen walking through the whole OT.

4 Defined the mission

From 'restore the kingdom to Israel' to 'witnesses to the ends of the earth.' The disciples entered with a small vision and left with the largest possible one.

5 Established the Church's pattern

Emmaus: Word opened, bread broken, eyes recognising — the shape of Christian worship. Ten days of prayer before Pentecost — the original pattern of waiting on God.

6 Set the pattern of the return

From the Mount of Olives, with a cloud, visibly, bodily. The same mountain. The same manner. The same Jesus. The departure was the first movement of a return already guaranteed.

KNOWLEDGE CHECK · Q4

According to Luke 24:45, what did Jesus do for the disciples' understanding of Scripture?

- A. He gave them a written commentary on the Old Testament
- B. He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures**
- C. He told them to study the Psalms more carefully
- D. He replaced the Old Testament with his new teaching

✓ **Answer: B — He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures | The Greek *διανοήσας* — the same word used for the stone rolled from the tomb**

WHAT WE USUALLY MISS

Five Depths in the Forgotten Ascension

1. The Ascension is not an ending — it is an enthronement

The language of the NT is not departure language — it is coronation language. Psalm 110:1 says 'Sit at my right hand.' Jesus was ascending to the seat of all authority to begin his reign. The cloud was not a curtain coming down. It was a throne ascending to its place.

2. The last image of Jesus in the Gospels is his hands raised in blessing

Luke's final image is deliberate: hands raised, blessing being spoken, the body ascending while the benediction was still being pronounced. Luke 24:52 says the disciples returned to Jerusalem with *great joy* — because they understood the departure was not abandonment. It was the beginning of his fullest presence.

3. Human flesh is now permanently at the right hand of God

Jesus went up with his body. The Incarnation was permanent. At the very centre of divine reality, humanity is represented. The Father is being approached by a Son who knows what it is to be tired, lonely, to suffer, to die. He has taken all of that to the throne. Hebrews 4:15: he sympathises with our weaknesses because he has been there.

4. 'Why do you stand looking into heaven?' is still being asked

The angel's question is asked to every generation of Christians who become so heavenly minded that they stop being of earthly use. The question is perennially relevant: are you standing and staring — at the past, at what has been lost, at the sky where something used to be — when the commission is forward and the world has not yet heard?

5. The forty days ended — but what they began has not

Every person who reads the Scriptures with opened eyes is receiving what was given on the road to Emmaus. Every church that gathers to break bread is re-enacting the Emmaus table. Every person restored from failure and given a commission is being dealt with by the same risen Christ who built a charcoal fire for a broken fisherman. The forty days are finished. Everything they set in motion is still moving.

MATCH IT UP · THE WHOLE FORTY DAYS

REFERENCE / TERM	WHAT IT MEANS / ANSWERS
Days 1–8 · Jerusalem	Locked room · Peace · New-creation breath · Thomas's confession
Days 9–20 · Galilee	The charcoal fire · Three questions · Peter restored · 153 fish · James
Days 21–39 · Galilee / Jerusalem	Five hundred witnesses · The Great Commission · Kingdom teaching
Day 40 · Mount of Olives	The final question · The raised hands · The cloud · The coronation
Days 41–50 · Jerusalem	120 gathered · Prayer · Peter rises · Matthias chosen · Pentecost coming
Day 50 · Pentecost	Wind · Fire · Peter preaches · 3,000 believe · The Church is born

Study & Reflection — Series Finale

I · THE LAST QUESTION

The disciples' last question was still about Israel's political restoration — even after forty days. Jesus enlarged their vision beyond what they had asked for. What is the 'Israel question' in your own spiritual life — the deeply-formed expectation about what God should do that you keep returning to? What might it look like for him to enlarge your vision beyond what you have been asking?

Acts 1:6–8 · Isaiah 55:8–9 · Ephesians 3:20

II · THE RAISED HANDS

Jesus was lifted up while he was still blessing. Luke says the disciples returned to Jerusalem with great joy, not grief. What does it tell you about the Ascension that it produced great joy? And where in your own life do you most need to receive the benediction of the raised hands — the ongoing priestly blessing of the ascended Christ?

Luke 24:50–52 · Hebrews 13:20–21 · Numbers 6:24–26

III · STANDING AND STARING

“Why do you stand looking into heaven?” The angel's question turned the disciples from watching to walking. Is there a place in your own life where you are standing and staring — at a past season, a former way God felt close, something you have lost — when you are being invited to turn and walk toward the mission waiting? What does it look like to stop watching the sky and head back to Jerusalem?

Acts 1:11 · Philippians 3:13–14 · Isaiah 43:18–19

IV · HUMAN FLESH AT THE THRONE

Your advocate before the Father is not a distant divine administrator but someone who has been tired, betrayed, in agony, forsaken. He carries that knowledge into his eternal intercession for you. What does it mean, in a specific situation you are in right now, that the one making intercession for you knows exactly what it feels like to be you?

Hebrews 4:14–16 · Hebrews 7:25 · Romans 8:34

V · THE WAITING

The disciples were commissioned to the ends of the earth and then told to wait. They gathered, prayed, and waited for the power before they moved. Is there a calling in your life that you have been trying to drive forward on your own momentum rather than waiting for the Spirit's empowerment? What would faithful, expectant waiting look like for you right now?

Acts 1:14 · Isaiah 40:31 · John 15:5

VI · THE WHOLE SERIES

Looking back over all four posts — from the locked room to the mountain of blessing — which moment in the forty days has lodged most deeply in you? Which scene, which person, which truth do you carry forward differently because of it?

Acts 2:42 · Luke 24:45 · Matthew 28:20

Key Scriptures

Luke 24:50–52 · Acts 1:1–14 · Zechariah 14:1–9 · Psalm 110 · Daniel 7:13–14 · Hebrews 4:14–16 · Hebrews 7:25 · John 16:7 · John 14:2–3 · Acts 2:33–35 · Hebrews 13:20–21

THE FORTY DAYS — SERIES COMPLETE

Post One · A City That Did Not Know — The First Eight Days · Jerusalem · The Locked Room · Thomas · “My Lord and My God”

Post Two · The Shore at Dawn — The Sea of Galilee · The Charcoal Fire · Three Questions · Peter’s Restoration · James

Post Three · The Kingdom in the Margins — Acts 1:3 · What Jesus Taught · The Curriculum · The Great Commission

Post Four · The Hill and the Hands — Day 40 · The Mount of Olives · The Ascension · The Blessing That Did Not End

“While he blessed them, he parted from them and was carried up into heaven. And they worshipped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy.”

Luke 24:51–52 · The Hill and the Hands · The Forty Days · Series Complete

Read the full series at wovenandknown.com/read/daily-devotionals

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