

Acts 1:9-11 – Ascended to the cloud or in the cloud?

By Ed Stevens – Oct 29, 2020

Down below are some comments from various commentaries on Acts 1:9-11. First the biblical text. Pay close attention to the words in ALL CAPS:

[NAS95]

[Acts 1:2] until the day when HE WAS TAKEN UP [to heaven], after He had by the Holy Spirit given orders to the apostles whom He had chosen.

[Acts 1:9] And after He had said these things, He was LIFTED UP while they were looking on, and a cloud received Him out of their sight.

[Acts 1:10] And as they were GAZING INTENTLY INTO THE SKY while He was going, behold, two men in white clothing stood beside them.

[Acts 1:11] They also said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand LOOKING INTO THE SKY? This Jesus, who has been TAKEN UP from you INTO HEAVEN, will come in just the same way as you have WATCHED HIM GO INTO HEAVEN.”

Taking these four verses together as a whole narrative, some of the various interpretations can be eliminated. For instance, the assertion that “he didn’t actually rise up into the air” is not even a possible interpretation, since the angels plainly said that “he was taken up from you into heaven” (Acts 1:2; 1:11).

Furthermore, notice the words “lifted up” and “gazing intently into the sky” and “looking into the sky” and “taken up into heaven” and “watched him go into heaven”. This last phrase indicates that they literally “watched him go into heaven.”

Now it could mean that the cloud enveloped him first and then ascended with him in it, or it could mean that he was lifted UP to the cloud above which then enveloped him when he came up to it. But either way, the disciples watched him go UP into heaven. He was taken UP into heaven. The disciples were “gazing into the sky” and “looking into the sky” as he ascended. At some point he was “taken from their sight”.

Many of the conservative commentaries, especially the older ones, understand this to mean that Jesus was taken from their sight into the cloud ONLY after they had watched him ascend all the way up to the cloud. They do NOT give any credence to the skeptical notion that it was a mere magician’s “vanishing act” in a puff of smoke (cloud) while he was still on earth. The disciples didn't watch a puff of smoke ascend into the sky. They “watched HIM go into heaven”. Here are some other comments:

[Matthew Henry Commentary] “This cloud received him, it is probable, when he had gone about as far from the earth as the clouds generally are”.

[Jamieson, Fausset, Brown Commentary] Lest it should be thought He had disappeared when they were looking in some other direction, and so he was only concluded to have gone up to heaven, it is here expressly said that “while they were looking He was taken up, and a cloud

received Him out of their sight.” So Elijah, “If thou see me when I am taken from thee” (2 Kings 2:10); “And Elisha saw it.”

[Baker Exegetical Commentary] The compound verb ἐπαίρω, with its idea of “taking up in support” placed alongside the mention of the cloud, suggests that the cloud enveloped him from underneath and took him away (Dan. 7:13). The description has biblical and Jewish precedent. Other biblically rooted raptures described in Judaism include Enoch (Gen. 5:24) and Elijah (2 Kings 2:11) in Philo, QG 1 §86. Josephus, Ant. 4.8.48 §326, speaks of Moses, who ascended according to Jewish tradition (Barrett 1994: 82). The rapture of Enoch appears in 1En. 39.3; 71.1 and 2En. 3.1–3 (Johnson 1992: 27; Haenchen 1987: 149n6). A rapture of Ezra appears in 2Esd. (4 Ezra) 14:48. Baruch is raptured in 2Bar. 76.2 (Pesch 1986a: 76). The cloud is not merely a vehicle for their ascension but probably is also a sign of God’s heavenly glory (Marshall 1980: 61; Fernando 1998: 72; Exod. 16:10; Ps. 104:3; Luke 9:34–35; Rev. 11:12) or the divine presence (Jervell 1998: 117; 1 Thess. 4:17; 1 En. 39.3). The last thing Jesus does on earth before ascending to the Father’s side is to give this commission, which shows its importance. Witherington (1998: 112) observes that, like the passing of the mantle from Elijah to Elisha, Acts 1 points to the passing on of Jesus’s power and authority to his witnesses. It is not so much that Jesus passes his power on to them, however, but that he will share it with them, as they are obedient to the call of mission. This enablement will be provided by the Spirit, as verse 8 suggests with its reference to “power” (Luke 24:47–49).