

The Fable of "Ascension and Return of Jesus" never existed in ancient copies of four Canonical Gospels. This fable was blended in Gospel of Mark and Gospel of Luke much later. <https://wp.me/p4GOwl-rN>

The legend of the Ascension is the result of a gradual glorification of the Lord. At first there was some confusion, because Jesus had himself told one of the thieves, who had been crucified with him: "Verily I say unto thee: Today shalt thou be with me in paradise" (Luke, 23:43).

Relying on this prophecy, the Gospel of Peter asserted an immediate ascension (Gospel of Peter, Ch. 5). We also read in the Epistle of Barnabas: "That is why we celebrate with joy the day on which, after showing himself, he ascended into heaven" (The Epistle of Barnabas, 15:9).

But Christians had to belie their savior and take him to Hades to fulfil other prophecies. They, therefore, postponed his resurrection and ascension to a future date. The ascension of Jesus is recorded in three different passages in the New Testament. Matthew and John are absolutely silent. If the ascension had occurred, would they have omitted to mention this most wonderful miracle of all? The first reference appears in a verse in Mark: "So then, after the Lord had spoken unto them, he was received up into heaven and sat on the right hand of God" (Mark, 16:19).

Luke says: "And he led them as far as to Bethany, and he lifted up his hands and blessed them. And it came to pass, while he blessed them, he was parted from them and carried up into heavens" (Luke, 24:50-51).

To complete the story, I will also mention the only other passage in the New Testament which speaks of the ascension: "And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud removed him out of their sight" (Acts, 1:9).

The passage in Mark is a forgery. All the most important manuscripts - the Codex Vaticanus, the Greek Codex Sinaiticus and the Sinaitic Syriac do not contain this verse. In the fourth century Eusebius said that "in the accurate manuscripts Mark ended with verse 8 of Chapter 16. Saint Jerome also confirmed this and the Greek Fathers of the same period, Athanasius, the two Cyrils, Basil and Gregory Nazianzen, do not even mention this passage. Neither did Tertullian, nor Cyprian, rely on this verse. I may mention that the Armenian text of 986 CE attributes this verse to Ariston, the Presbyter of the second century. This verse of Mark has not only been rejected by Westcott and Hort but by all other scholars, irrespective of their school of thought. The verse itself contains inherent evidence which clearly indicates that it is not the product of an eye-witness. Mark, as I have already mentioned, was not one of the disciples of Jesus. He wrote on

hearsay. The verse really portrays an imaginary version and the belief of the author or the redactor; for no one could say of his personal knowledge or observation that Jesus "sat on the right hand of God."

It is a curious fact that, like the passage in Mark, the verses of Luke are also forgeries. Dummelow admits that "the ancient authorities omit these words," and adds that if the words "and carried up into heaven" are omitted, it is possible to regard this event, not as an ascension, but as a disappearance of Jesus at the end of the interview (Dummelow, Commentary on the Holy Bible, 769).

Peake in his Commentary on the Bible says: "The words "and was carried up into heaven" are omitted in some of the best MSS., and have probably crept in from Acts, 1:9" (Peake, Commentary on the Bible, 742).

The interpolation in this instance is very clumsy. It is exposed by the context itself. I will reproduce the three verses of Ch. 26 with the interpolated words in *italics*:

"50. And he led them out as far as to Bethany, and he lifted up his hands, and blessed them. "

"51. And it came to pass, while he blessed them, he was parted from them, *and was carried up into heaven.* "

"52. And they *worshipped him*, and returned to Jerusalem with *great joy.*"

The words *worshipped him* and *with great joy* are also the result of forgeries (Revised Version, p. 1167; See also Dummelow, Commentary on the Holy Bible, 769). It is obvious that the intervening verse only serves to put the other two verses out of joint. It is amusing to note that the disciples *worshipped him* when he was supposed to have vanished and had been *carried up into heaven*. Verses 50-52 without the interpolations, make a natural reading:

"And he led them out as far as Bethany, and he lifted up his hands and blessed them. And it came to pass, while he blessed, he was parted from them. And they returned to Jerusalem. "

Mark and Luke, therefore, do not mention this unique event. Matthew and John are absolutely silent. The Prayer Book of the Church of England says:

"Whatever is not read therein, nor may be proved thereby, is not to be required of any man, that it should be believed. "

Why in the name of the Lord then, does the Church preach the Ascension of Jesus, and why do the Christians of Jerusalem strain their eyes daily to watch Jesus come down to earth from heaven?

I have already given detailed reasons why the authority of the Acts as a whole has never been admitted and have referred to Codex Bezae and the other "Western Manuscripts" to show that the various manuscripts differ. The compilers of the Encyclopedia Biblica after commenting on this aspect of the Acts say:

"The results then with reference to the trustworthiness of the Acts, as far as its facts are concerned, are these:

No statement merits immediate acceptance on the ground of its presence in the book... positive proof of the trustworthiness of the Acts must be tested with the greatest care" (Ency. Biblica, Col. 46).

Thus, the two references in the Gospels are forgeries and, being of a spurious nature, are, therefore, unworthy of reliance. Again, the ascension in clouds presupposes a heaven towards the sky. Is there any justification for this supposition? If not, is Jesus to be represented as theoretically giving an illusion for the satisfaction of his disciples? The words: he was parted from them, in Luke, only convey that Jesus was taking leave of them, and removing himself further from them, and on the Mount of Transfiguration a cloud had interposed itself between Jesus and them, and, with the numerous olive trees on the Mount, he was concealed from their sight, a result which on the assurance of the two unknown men in white the disciples regarded as a reception of Jesus into heaven.

The reference of Mark to Jesus sitting on the right hand of God is again a repetition of the Psalms (Ps., 110:1). The imagination of primitive Christians must, however, have felt a strong temptation to depict this exaltation as a brilliant spectacle. When once it was realized that Jesus as Messiah must have arrived at such an exalted position, it must have appeared desirable that someone should gaze after him, as it were, on his way to heaven. The future return of Daniel had to be a visible descent on clouds (Dan., 7:13). This itself suggested that Jesus' departure to heaven should also be represented as a visible ascent on a cloud. Therefore, Luke only makes an assertion in the Acts to this effect (Acts, 1:9). He also discloses a nervous desire to provide "witnesses."

The ascension of Jesus is rendered unbelievable not only by the fact that the two evangelists, first and fourth, make no mention of it at all, but also for want of agreement between the two who do mention it. Mark is at variance with Luke and Luke is at variance with himself. From the narrative of Mark, it is obvious that Jesus ascended on the day of his resurrection, immediately after the meal at which he appeared to the disciples in a house in Jerusalem. Now, since ascension through a roof might have presented certain difficulties, Mark described it as having taken place in the open air at the Mount of Olives near Bethany. Luke also conveys that the ascension took place on the day of the resurrection, but in the Acts he definitely asserts that **it was forty days after** (Acts, 1:3). Paul, however, describes another visit of Jesus to this world after the forty days, for Jesus appeared to him long after at Damascus. The appearance of Jesus to his brother James is sandwiched in during the interval. Thus, Jesus must have been making upward and downward journeys between heaven and earth.

But, in spite of the discrepancies and divergences already mentioned, can anyone believe that a palpable body which still has flesh and bones and eats material earthly food (Matt., 11:19) be qualified for a celestial abode? Jesus himself, referring to married life, said that life in heaven would not be earthly (Matt., 22: 29-30). It is a peculiar coincidence that during his life, before the resurrection, Jesus was blamed for eating and drinking, and he continued to do so even after his supposed resurrection.

How can an earthly body so far liberate itself from the laws of gravity as to be capable of an ascent through air? Nowhere are we told that the grosser elements which the body of Jesus still retained after the resurrection had been removed before his ascent. Besides, the disciples, who were present at the time of the ascension did not observe any residuum of his body which he had left behind.

But what became of Jesus? Before I answer this question, I must give some details of the **secret Order** known as the Essenes (meaning the Pious) which existed at the time of Jesus and to which Jesus and John the Baptist belonged (Renan, Life of Jesus, 34. See also Julicher, Hat Jesus Gelebt, 48). Jesus had been "admitted into the Order at the same time with John in their years of early manhood" (Crucifixion, by an Eye-Witness, 35).

Josephus described the Essenes Order as a **secret brotherhood** which was opposed to the Pharisees and Sadducees. They are nowhere mentioned in the Bible, but Philo of Alexandria, who was the first to assert that Jesus had been claimed by the members of this brotherhood, gave their number as about 4,000. Irenaeus and Epiphanius mentioned this sect as forming an

integral part of the Ebionites. We are told that they disappeared in the second century: no doubt having been dissolved by Christianity. Lightfoot, however, refers to them as having been absorbed by the Sampasanes.

What most struck the outside observer was the strictness and secrecy of their Order. They usually held their meetings in uninhabited places, where they built their monasteries of "White Houses." In villages and towns, they settled round a central house of their Order. In these monasteries or central houses, they followed their observances together. A three years' novitiate was necessary before admission to the Order; the entrant was pledged by oaths of the most solemn kind to obedience and reticence; to hate the wicked and to side with the just. While describing the Essenes, the Encyclopedia Britannica says:

"They wore simple white garments and did not own a change of clothes. Their conduct was orderly and their conversation restrained ... cases of disobedience were almost unknown, neither bribe nor torture could make them false to their sect" (Ency. Brit., 14th Edn. Art. Essenes. Italics are mine).

Josephus tells us that the Essenes, because of their long [white garments](#), resorted to countless washings, and avoidance of impurities prevented the members of the brotherhood from coming into contact even with a novice. The Encyclopedia Biblica says that: "They had investigated, to good purpose, in the interests of medicine, the healing virtues of roots and stones" (Ency. Biblica, Col. 1938).

In short, the Essenes were members of a strict secret Order, who would not contact non-members; who hated the wicked; who knew the healing virtues of herbs and minerals; who were distinguished by their long white garments and who had their monastic lodges in uninhabited places and central houses in villages and towns. To this Order did Jesus belong, and was, perhaps, one of its leaders.

I must also mention a peculiar feature in the life of Jesus. It was his habit to withdraw himself, at different times, for prayers to the mountains. He did this both in Galilee and near Jerusalem (Matt., 14: 23-24; 15: 29; 17: 1; 21: 17; Mark, 13: 3. Luke, 21: 37; John, 8: 1), and we find that everything which was a little out of the ordinary was done on a mountain (Luke, 6: 12. John, 6: 3). We are told that Jesus used to withdraw in secret alone to these mountains (John, 6: 15), and if necessary, his disciples used to visit him "privately" at these places (Mark, 13: 1-3). When Jesus was afraid for his life, he took shelter in an unknown place (John, 10: 39-40). He used suddenly to disappear and reappear (John, 15: 25). At the most crucial moment of his life, he

went to the Mount of Olives (Luke, 22: 39), the place is described also as Gethsemane (Matt., 26: 36; Mark, 14: 26, 32). And his ascension was likewise alleged to be from a mountain (Acts, 1: 9, 12). Matthew speaks of his last appearance to the disciples in the mountains of Galilee (Matt., 28:16).

It is a peculiar fact that after his alleged resurrection Jesus always greeted people by saying: "Peace be unto you" (Luke, 24: 36; John, 20: 19, 21, 26), a sign of recognition peculiar to the Essenes (The Crucifixion, by an Eye- Witness 22).

Edersheim mentions a "white house" of the Essenes on the top of the Mount of Olives, the edge of which is regarded as the point of ascension (Edersheim. The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah, 1: 148). Christians now have a sanctuary there, and near this place the very footprints, sometimes of the right foot and sometimes of the left, of Jesus, on the rock are pointed out to pilgrims.

Joseph of Arimathea, who was unknown to the disciples and was described by John [as a secret disciple of Jesus](#), belonged to the Essenes Order (Jewish Ency. Vol. 8:250. See John, 19:38). Nicodemus, another member of the Order, used to come to Jesus [secretly by night](#) (John, 3:1-2). We are told that Mary Magdalene on looking into the Sepulcher found two angels in white sitting in it (John, 20:12) and Peter found the linen clothes neatly wrapped together in the sepulcher (John, 20:7). Luke also mentions two men in shining garments at the Sepulcher (Luke, 24:4). Mark speaks of a young man in a long white garment (Mark 16: 5) who was hiding inside the tomb, no doubt to avoid detection. One of Jesus' followers, whom the Gospels could not identify, also wore a long white robe (Acts, 1:10). In the Acts we are told that two men in white apparel appeared to the disciples just at the time Jesus was "taken up" (Ibid.). And, lastly, Jesus himself appeared to his disciples in the mountains of Galilee in "raiments... shining exceedingly white like snow," and warned Peter to keep it a secret (Mark, 9: 3: Matt., 17:1-2; Luke, 9:20).

It need hardly be mentioned that white garments do shine in the dark. It is, perhaps, now a simple matter to answer the question: Who were these angels or men in white robes? To Christians these men in white garments have always remained a mystery and they, therefore, described them as angels. The Holy Qur'an styles these helpers of Jesus as hawariyyoon (The Holy Qur'an, 3: 52). This cannot be a reference to the so-called disciples of Jesus who were always "wondering" and "doubting" and were running away from Jesus whenever he was in adversity. The word hawariyyoon is a plural of hawari, which is from the root hoor (meaning: simple whiteness. The word hawari, therefore, means "one who whitens his clothes or garments

by washing and beating them" (Lane. E. G., The Arabic-English Lexicon, Book 2: 666). Lane opines that for this reason the word hawariyyoon is applied to the companions (not the disciples) of Jesus (Ibid.). [The Holy Qur'an is very exact in its terminology and it described the helpers of Jesus by their distinctive dress-white garments.](#)

I will quote the words of Celsus in this connection:

"The angels referred to by the Gospels in connection with the Resurrection (and may I add Ascension) were colleagues of Jesus, who were unknown to the disciples of Jesus, and must have been two members of the Essenes Order who according to the peculiar features of this sect wore white robes" (Orig: C. Cels., C. 53).

Paulus refers to the two men in white apparel as the secret colleagues of Jesus. Edersheim in his Life and Times of Jesus, the Messiah, while referring to a white house "on the top of this very hill which belonged to the Essenes," says that "while engulfed in the clouds, Jesus went into this house." Balvidt also says that Jesus went to an Essenes lodge, which exists till today on the top of the Mount of Olives, and he rested there. Brenecke asserts further that thereafter Jesus long continued to work for the welfare of Jews in far-off lands.

In view of these facts, it is not difficult to reconstruct the scenes of the resurrection and that of the ascension.

Joseph of Arimathea, a member of the Essenes Order, owned a private garden, in a rock in which he had an unused tomb made for himself. Under direction of this Order, he asked Pilate for the body of Jesus. He took it down, and Nicodemus, another member of the same Order, brought a hundred-pound weight of myrrh and aloes powder; and some other medicine. The members of this Order, Nicodemus particularly, knew the use of medicine. The Marham-i-Isa, the Ointment of Jesus, to which a reference has already been made, was prepared and applied to the wounds of Jesus on this occasion. The linen was wound round and round the wounds, after these medicines had been applied (Crucifixion, by an Eye-Witness, 75). They placed the body in the tomb. They were careful to leave his neck and face uncovered. They did not fill up the tomb with earth, but placed a stone on it. Let me not presume that they visited the sepulcher during the first night, but knowledge must be attributed to them that they should permit nature to come to their rescue and cure Jesus. [They smoked the tomb with aloes](#) (Ibid.) and other strengthening herbs. The chill of the stone floor and walls of the tomb, to some extent, revived and awakened Jesus. Let me further not presume that they did anything to the body of Jesus during the following day. [During the Saturday night Jesus regained consciousness and, before sunrise, they](#)

carried him away to a house in the garden and later took him to the central house of their Order in Jerusalem.

"Thirty hours had not passed since the assumed death of Jesus when the brother heard a slight noise within the grotto... and he heard with inexpressible joy that the legs of the body moved and that it breathed. He at once hastened to Jesus to assist him, and heard slight sounds rising from his breast. The face assumed a living appearance and the eyes opened and in astonishment gazed at the novice of our Order" (Ibid., 79).

After narrating that on information of the recovery of Jesus being conveyed, Joseph of Arimathea, Nicodemus and twenty-four other members of the Order went to the tomb, the Eye-Witness states:

"But Jesus was not yet strong enough to walk; therefore, he was carried to the house belonging to our Order that was close to the Calvary" (Ibid., 87).

At about this juncture Mary Magdalene with the other women came to the sepulcher, that is, on Sunday morning when it was "yet dark," and not only saw the stone rolled away, but also saw Jesus being carried away by them. Without looking into the sepulcher, she at once ran back to Peter and bewailed: "They have taken away the Lord out of the Sepulcher and we know not where they have laid him" (John, 20: 2).

I have already explained fully why Jesus had of necessity to appear after intervals to his disciples and why, owing to the tenderness of his wounds, he did not allow Mary Magdalene to touch him, though subsequently he himself invited Thomas to do so.

The ascension is a simpler matter still. Jesus was going up the mountain when he is said to have parted from his disciples. Heavy clouds, as often happens in mountainous country, came low and their mist gradually engulfed him. The olive trees on the Mount also screened him. By the time the clouds had lifted he had reached the summit and had entered the "white house" or, in other words, had crossed the ridge (Crucifixion, by an Eye-Witness, 124). On the assurance of the two secret colleagues in white, who became visible after the lifting of the mist, the wondering disciples regarded this event as the reception of Jesus into heaven.

Lo and behold! the two miracles, the Resurrection and the Ascension, on which is founded the entire Christian faith, disappear. The stupendous Christological superstructure, so laboriously built, falls into a heap of rubbish.