

From the April 4, 2009 Issue

Christ's Ascension and the Marriage of Heaven and Earth

Two great romances started in Genesis 1.

Through his mighty Word and hovering Spirit, the Father created humanity, male and female, destined to be united in one flesh. But there was another love story that began that day—the epic romance between heaven and earth. The Bible's story begins (Gen 1.1) with their creation as 2 separate entities, and it ends (Rev 21.1-2) with their union and everything that happens as a result.

Heaven and earth flirt all through the Old Testament. In a dream, Jacob sees the business being conducted between the two distinct-but-connected dimensions. We even catch glimpses of occasional human travel between them. This climaxes in Daniel's vision of the Son of Man “coming on the clouds” on a trip from earth to heaven, inaugurating a very different kind of kingdom.

When Jesus arrives, he announces that the romance has entered a new phase; he describes this phase-transition with countless analogies that start with “The kingdom of heaven is like...” Just as frequently, he talks the upcoming centerpiece of this phase-transition—the Son of Man fulfilling Daniel's prophecy, de-throning the earth's abusive boyfriends by riding the clouds from earth all the way to heaven, the earth's CEO's office.

Throughout the New Testament, we frequently see heaven “open” like a wormhole between parallel universes, for the purposes of communication and transport. But Jesus' ascension seems to be in a category all its own. Because he is the One in whom all things live and move and have their being, his ascension causes an entirely new heaven-earth integration to begin. The flesh-and-blood Jesus ascended “in order to fill the whole universe” (Eph 4.10). In a mysterious but fully real way, Jesus being in heaven means all of earth being in heaven.

Heaven is the earth's destiny, a future already realized inside the skin of Jesus, a future now mediated to the earth through the Spirit's presence, “until the time comes for God to restore everything” (Acts 3.21). On the day when heaven is unified with the earth, Jesus will be fully visible to our eyes, and WE will finally be truly visible to ourselves and each other for the first time. (Col 3.3-4)

The final marriage of heaven and earth will transform both into something quite new. We are like the earth's bridesmaids, walking her down the aisle. And we rejoice that the wedding has begun, that the waiting has begun to be over. The union of heaven and earth has been achieved in Christ; it cannot be undone. The lovers have begun their embrace, and they will never be broken apart.

~ John Stonecypher