

"Watchman, what of the night?"



"The hour has come, the hour is striking, and striking at you, the hour and the end!" Ezekiel 7:6 (Moffatt)

**"THE ASCENSION OF CHRIST
INTO HEAVEN: ANOTHER
LOOK INTO VARIOUS
ASPECTS OF THIS ESSENTIAL
BIBLICAL TRUTH"**

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Editor's Preface

[An important note from the Editor: Due to a few snags hitting the Foundation, coupled with the delays caused by the worldwide Coronavirus pandemic, we apologize for the late release of this issue of the thought paper.]

This Issue of WWN will be the start of a series of articles on a topic that is important to one's understanding of the sanctuary truth - the ascension of Jesus into heaven. Throughout the Christian era, Christ's post-resurrection ascent into the heavenly realm has been an event generally acknowledged by most professed Christians. For example, after the first century (Apostolic time period), two of the most universal and well known of Christendom's creeds that have come down into our time - the *Apostles Creed* and the *Nicene / Constantinopolitan Creed* - mention the Ascension as follows:

The *Apostles Creed* (concerning Christ) - "the third day he rose from the dead; he ascended into heaven; and sitteth at the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead." ¹

The *Nicene / Constantinopolitan Creed* (concerning Christ) - "and the third day he rose again, according to the Scriptures; and ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of the Father; and he shall come again, with glory, to judge both the quick and the dead; whose kingdom shall



have no end." ¹ However, there are two basic things regarding this recognition of the Ascension that needs to be discerned and noted. First, overall, the importance of this truth has usually not been perceived and understood to the extent that many of the other Christian teachings have been. By comparison, in greater and lesser degrees, it more often than not is relegated to a marginal position of essentiality in Christian thought. Particularly in more modern times, due largely to the present secularization of humanity's "worldview" of the universe, the ascension of Christ into heaven is viewed as an unscientific, outmoded, and obsolete concept from archaic times characterized by ignorance and superstition. As these excerpts from *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia* state:

"In modern times, a literal (biblical) reading of the ascension-stories has become problematic, due to the differences between the pre-scientific cosmology of the times of Jesus, and the scientific worldview that leaves no place for a Heaven above us ... an embarrassment for an age that no longer conceives of a physical Heaven located above the Earth ... in modern times the Ascension is seen less as the climax of the mystery of Christ than as 'something of an embarrassment in the age of the telescope and the space probe,' an 'idea [that] conjures up an outdated cosmology.'" ²

Moreover, the tendency of post-Apostolic Christianity to shift attention away from the other-worldly/heavenly minded emphasis of the first-century church toward an increasingly this-worldly/earthly minded emphasis, began early on to produce more of a concentration toward Christ's *earthly* salvific activity and correspondingly less focus on His *heavenly* salvific duties. As this observation posted by a writer on a popular Christian

website pointedly declares:

"The ascension of Jesus Christ into Heaven is one of the most important events recorded in the New Testament. But though it occupies a vital place in Scripture, it doesn't get a lot of attention today, even among Christians. My guess is that you probably haven't read any books about it or heard many sermons on it. *Usually we focus on the crucifixion and the resurrection.*" (emphasis added). ³

The second thing that needs proper discernment regarding Christendom's recognition of the Ascension has to do with its relative lack of biblical exposition on this subject. Compared with other theological topics, the amount of "attention" devoted to this truth is often infrequent and substantially meager. As the aforementioned creeds show, while the actual literal ascent of our Lord into heaven and corresponding seating at the right hand of God are stated, the more comprehensive meaning and importance of these events are treated more like non-essential, borderline teachings than the vital, essential biblical doctrines that they actually are. Again, what we are witnessing is the progressive tendency within the majority of professed Christianity to confine all of Christ's work of salvation to His earthly mission alone. Beyond this, anything salvific that our Lord is doing in heaven is either denied or downplayed as peripheral at best. This lopsided view of the *total* work of Jesus has created a serious imbalance in the scriptural view of the whole plan of salvation. By viewing the heavenly work of Christ as inconsequential, will we not be inclined to direct our "affection (mind) on things on the earth" rather than on "those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God," the very heavenly "things" that we are

admonished to "seek"? (see Colossians 3: 1-2).

THE ASCENSION OF CHRIST INTO HEAVEN: ANOTHER LOOK INTO VARIOUS ASPECTS OF THIS ESSENTIAL BIBLICAL TRUTH - 1 -

Introductory Overview -

The book of Acts begins with this testimony:

"The former treatise have I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach, Until the day in which he was taken up" (Acts 1: 1-2b).

The "former treatise" that Luke had written to "Theophilus" (Luke 1: 1-4) is what we refer to as the Gospel of Luke. In it is recorded "all that Jesus began both to do and teach," that Luke had compiled "in order" (successively) through eyewitness accounts, with Luke himself "having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first." This first treatise "sets forth" those things "began" by Jesus - i.e., a record of "all" His *earthly* life and ministerial work - "Until" the narrative *ends* with an account of His being "taken up":

"And he led them out 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 heaven." (Luke 24: 50-51).

What is perfectly clear is the fact that while the first treatise written to Theophilus contains everything pertinent regarding Christ's earthly work, it - as well as the three other Gospel stories - is not the entire conclusion of Jesus's salvific work. Rather, the "finished" earthly work of our Lord was the absolutely necessary antecedent to the *beginning* of His salvific heavenly work. The

later treatise (the book of Acts) is the continuing narrative chronicling the results and meaning of Christ's work in heaven. Obviously, the event that pinpoints this earth to heaven transition is the physical (literal) ascension of our Lord from earth into heaven as witnessed by His disciples:

"And ('Jesus') being assembled together with them ('the apostles'), commanded them ... And when he had spoken ... while they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight." (Acts 1: 4, 9).

"So then after the Lord had spoken unto them, he was received up into heaven ..." (Mark 16: 19).⁴

During His public ministry, on various occasions, Jesus spoke of God (the Father) as the One who sent Him from heaven to earth. For instance, the day after the feeding of five thousand people, Jesus declared:

"All that the Father giveth me shall come to me ... For *I came down from heaven*, not to do mine own will, but the will of *him that sent me*. And this is the *Father's will which hath sent me* ... that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life: and I will raise him up at the last day." (John 6: 37-38, 40, *emph. added*).

Likewise, on occasion, Christ also spoke of His return to heaven. One of those incidents, at the Feast of Tabernacles approximately six months before His crucifixion, He stated:

"I am not come of myself, but he that sent me is true, whom ye know not. But I know him: for I am from him, and he hath sent me ... Then said Jesus unto them (the Jews), Yet a little while am I with you, *and then I go unto him that sent me*. Ye shall seek me, and shall not find me: and *where I am, thither ye cannot come*." (Ibid. 7: 28-29, 33-34, *emph. added*).

And on the night before His death, while He was walking with the disciples to the Garden of Gethsemane to pray, Jesus reiterated the truth of His upcoming ascension to the Father in heaven:

"I came forth from the Father, and am come into the world: *again, I leave the world, and go to the Father.*" (Ibid. 16: 28. *emph. added*).

On resurrection morning, upon Mary Magdalene's second visit to the empty tomb of Christ, she experienced an encounter with the resurrected Jesus, whom she initially thought was the "gardener," in which He informed her:

"Do not cling to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers, and tell them that I am now ascending to my Father and your Father, my God and your God." (John 20: 17, NEB).⁵

While "Mary Magdalene came and told the disciples that she had seen the Lord" (John 20: 18), Jesus, as He had said to Mary, ascended temporarily to heaven in order to present Himself before the Father as a wave sheaf offering of the "firstfruits of them that slept" (compare Leviticus 23: 10-11 with 1 Corinthians 15: 20, 23). He received the assurance from His Father that His sacrificial death / offering was accepted and that "All power [would be] given unto [Him] in heaven and in earth" (Matthew 28: 18). Sometime a little while later that morning, some of the other women - who had also earlier come to the tomb, found it empty, and were told by "two men ... in shining garments" (angels) that Jesus had "risen" from the dead - "returned from the sepulchre" with the good news of His resurrection. (Luke 24: 1-9):

"And as they went to tell his disciples, behold, Jesus" (*after* His subsequent ascension and return to earth) "met them, saying, All

hail. And they came *and held him by the feet, and worshipped him.*" (Matthew 28: 9, *emph. added*). The prior concern that Christ had expressed to Mary Magdalene of "cling [ing]" unto Him (so as to detain His brief appearance in Heaven before the Father) was no longer necessary.

The meaning and importance of this preliminary ascension and appearance of Jesus in heaven as a transient preparatory event preceding His more public, permanent transitional ascension from earth to heaven has not been widely acknowledged or perceived throughout the Christian era. In the Writings, the servant of the Lord has well expounded on this biblical truth:

"Jesus refused to receive the homage of His people until He had the assurance that His sacrifice was accepted by the Father. He ascended to the heavenly courts, and from God Himself heard the assurance that His atonement for the sins of men had been ample, that through His blood all might gain eternal life. The Father ratified the covenant made with Christ, that He would receive repentant and obedient men, and would love them even as He loves His Son. Christ was to complete His work, and fulfill His pledge to 'make a man more precious than fine gold; even a man than the golden wedge of Ophir' (Isaiah 13: 12). All power in heaven and on earth was given to the Prince of life, and He returned to His followers in a world of sin, that He might impart to them of His power and glory." (DA, pg. 790).⁶

In the time following our Lord's resurrection from the dead, having "shewed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of [the apostles] forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God ... while they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him

out of their sight." (Acts 1: 3, 9). The "cloud" that "received" Christ as He was being "taken up from [the apostles] into heaven" (Ibid. 1: 11), was a cloudy chariot of angels (compare Psalm 104: 3; with Psalm 68: 17). As Jesus "ascended up on high, he led a multitude of captives, and gave gifts unto men." (Ephesians 4: 8, marginal reading; compare with Psalm 68: 4-6, 18-20, 24). The "captives" which "he led," along with the angelic "cloud" escort "When he ascended up on high," were those whose "graves were opened" at the death of Christ. Subsequently, after Christ arose from the dead, these "saints which slept, arose, And came out of the graves after [Christ's] resurrection, and ... appeared unto many." (Matthew 27: 50-53). Now, clothed with immortality, these resurrected trophies of Christ's triumph over death are the living pledges that "afterward they that are Christ's at his (second) coming" will also be given eternal life. (1 Corinthians 15: 23).

The Psalmist, centuries earlier, prophetically recorded the joyous anticipation of all of heaven as Jesus, along with the ascending throng, drew near to the awaiting city of God:

"Lift up your heads, O ye gates; and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in."

"Who is this King of glory?"

"The Lord strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle."

"Lift up your heads, O ye gates; even lift them up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in."

"Who is this King of glory?"

"The Lord of hosts, he is the King of glory." (Psalm 24: 7-10).

As Christ enters heaven through the opened "gates," He proceeds to the throne

of God situated in the heavenly sanctuary within the city of God, New Jerusalem. The time for Jesus to be "received up *into glory*" (1 Timothy 3: 16, *emph. added*), commences with His entrance into "the (heavenly) sanctuary once and for all [to secure] an eternal deliverance." (Hebrews 9: 12, NEB).⁵ Before He can begin His work as High Priest, Jesus must first "anoint the most Holy" according to the prophecy of Daniel 9: 24. As Moses, in the type, anointed the *earthly* sanctuary before the Levitical priests could begin their earthly intercessory work (see Exodus 30: 22-29; 40: 9; Leviticus 8: 10; Numbers 7: 1), so Christ, in the antitype, anointed the *heavenly* sanctuary before He could begin His heavenly intercessory work (see, again, Daniel 9: 24). And as Moses, "the forerunner" to the Levitical priests, had to first enter "into that within the veil" in order to anoint the *earthly* "most Holy" (the second apartment of the earthly sanctuary), before anointing the rest of the earthly sanctuary, so Christ, "the forerunner is for us entered," first "into that within the veil" in order to anoint the *heavenly* "most Holy" (the second apartment of the heavenly sanctuary), before anointing the rest of the heavenly sanctuary. (see Hebrews 6: 19-20). The anointing of the heavenly sanctuary was an inaugural of the "greater and more perfect tabernacle (sanctuary), not made by hands" (Ibid. 9: 11), that is, putting into service the real sanctuary of which the earthly sanctuary, made by human "hands," was but the type:

"For Christ has entered, not that sanctuary made by men's hands which is only a symbol of the reality, but heaven itself, to appear now before God on our behalf." (Ibid. 9: 24, NEB).⁵

This change from the earthly sanctuary to

the heavenly sanctuary took place when Jesus entered into it "once for all" at His ascension. The "eternal deliverance" that Christ "secured" at this inaugural involved the way in dealing with sin that went from the temporal to the eternal. Putting into service the heavenly sanctuary means the old covenant, the Levitical priesthood, the animal sacrifices, the temporal promises, etc, have all now been superseded by the eternal realities that these things had formerly but symbolized. Therefore, as a result:

"So now, my friends, the blood of Jesus makes us free to enter boldly into the sanctuary by the new, living way which he has opened for us through the curtain (veil) of his flesh (marginal reading). We have, moreover, a great priest set over the household of God; so let us make our approach in sincerity of heart and full assurance of faith ..." (Ibid. 10: 19-22, NEB).⁵

In contrast, under the Levitical type, the approach to God's presence was confined *only* to the priests through a *limited* entry into an *earthly* structure. Thus the "hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast" (Ibid. 6: 19), was accomplished through Jesus by His anointing of the heavenly sanctuary (both Holy and Most Holy apartments) preparatory to His mediatorial work symbolized by the "daily" and "yearly" ministries of the Levitical priests "Who serve unto the example and shadow of heavenly things" (Ibid. 8: 5).

Next, the coronation of Christ as King and High Priest after the order of Melchizedek, as prophetically predicted (compare Genesis 14: 17-20; with Psalm 110: 1-7; with Hebrews 7: 1-28), takes place. Jesus is "set on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens; A minister of the sanctuary, and of the true tabernacle, which the Lord

pitched, and not man." (Hebrews 8: 1-2). This enthronement of Christ is symbolically depicted in the inaugural scenes of Revelation, chapters 4 and 5. Chapter 4 begins with "a door opened in heaven" which leads to the heavenly throne room where God the Father is envisioned seated upon "a throne" surrounded by heavenly beings. There are "seven lamps of fire burning before the throne," reminiscent of the seven lamps upon the golden lampstand which stood in the Holy Place (first apartment) in the earthly sanctuary. (Exodus 25: 31, 37). This suggests that the heavenly throne room, at the time of the vision, was situated in the *first* apartment of the heavenly sanctuary. The heavenly hosts around the throne swell their voices in praises and worship to the One sitting on the throne as the Creator of all things.

In Revelation, chapter 5, the scene continues with the Father holding in His "right hand ... a book written within and on the backside, sealed with seven seals." A challenge is issued by "a strong angel" as to "Who is worthy to open the book, and loose the seals thereof?" The "book" and the information it contains appears to be of the most supreme interest to all. When "no man" was found worthy "to open ... neither to look thereon," it caused the Apostle John to "[weep] much." This prompts "one of the elders" to tell John to "Weep not: behold, the Lion of the tribe of Juda, the Root of David, hath prevailed to open the book, and to loose the seven seals thereof." John then sees "in the midst of the throne ... a Lamb as it had been slain ... And he (the Lamb) came and took the book out of the right of him that sat upon the throne." Immediately, the heavenly beings throughout all creation ascribe the highest honors to the "Lamb" because of His worthiness to open and unseal

the book, all to the glory of the Father.

What is evident from the symbolism in these chapters is the fact that it reveals the seating of Christ on the Father's throne at His ascension into heaven is predicated directly upon the great victory accomplished by the sacrificial death of Jesus on the cross. Thus this inaugural vision transitions the plan of salvation from Christ's finished earthly work to the beginning of His heavenly work. We will search out the biblical facets, implications, and meaning of this in upcoming issues of the thought paper.

» *To be Continued.*

1. Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom, vol. 2, The Greek and Latin Creeds* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1993), 45, 59.
2. Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia, *Ascension of Jesus* (Article: Views on the ascension, Cosmology), https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ascension_of_Jesus {Parentheses supplied.}
3. Christianity.com, *The Ascension of Jesus - What was the Meaning and Significance?* (Article: The Ascension of Jesus Christ), [https://www.christianity.com/jesus/death-and-resurrection/ascension/why-does-christ-s-ascension-matter-to-](https://www.christianity.com/jesus/death-and-resurrection/ascension/why-does-christ-s-ascension-matter-to-us.html)

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4. (Note: Because it is the majority opinion of most textual scholars and critics that Mark 16: 9-20 was not penned by Mark himself, the debate on whether or not these verses should be considered canonical (an inspired part of the biblical text), is crucial in dealing with any doctrinal subject addressed by these verses. Presently, the entire issue of authorship and canonicity of Mark 16: 9-20 still remains unresolved. In light of this observation, along with the fact that Mark 16: 19 bears explicit witness to Christ's ascension into heaven that is in complete harmony with other explicit biblical texts whose inspirational status is unquestioned (Luke 24: 51; Acts 1: 2, 9-11), it is this editor's conviction that the witness of Mark 16: 19 should be given due consideration in any study of Jesus's ascension into heaven even though the all-around truthfulness and meaning of this event neither stands nor falls solely with the question of whether or not Mark wrote verse 19 himself).

5. *The New English Bible* (Cambridge University Press, 1972), 128, 264, 265.

6. Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1940), 790.

* All Scripture quotations are from the King James Version unless otherwise indicated.

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