

A study of Jesus Christ

The study of the ascension of Christ into heaven was divided into two principal divisions, namely, the historical and the benefits or fruits of His ascension. Last week we dealt with the fruits of Christ's ascension and today we will look at the historical details of His ascension.

We touched on nine questions about the historical perspective last week, which can be reduced to the following four questions:

- I. Where did Christ ascend to?
- II. In what manner did He ascend?
- III. For what purpose did He ascend?
- IV. In what does the ascension of Christ differ from ours?

I. Where did Christ ascend to?

After Christ had given many infallible proofs to his apostles of His resurrection from the dead, and of His true humanity, he ascended into heaven, in the sight of His disciples, on the fortieth day after his resurrection, when He was with them in Bethany.

The term *heaven* has, as it is used in the Scripture, three meanings.

Firstly, it means the air, "**Behold the fowls of the heaven.**" (Matt 6:26).

Secondly, it means the ethereal region beyond, including the celestial spheres.

Psa 8:3 When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers, the moon and the stars, which You have ordained;

David here is in prayer praising God and mentions 'Your heavens' and contrasts with that the insignificance of man and that God would 'take thought of him.'

Eph 4:10 He who descended is Himself also He who ascended far above all the heavens, so that He might fill all things.

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Thirdly, it means the place of the blessed, which is that immense, bright, clear, and glorious space which is without and above this world, and these visible heavens, the abode of God and of the blessed, in which God manifests himself immediately and gloriously to all eternity, and communicates himself to the blessed angels and men, and where the seat of our blessedness is prepared with Christ.

It is in this heaven that God is said to dwell; not that He is contained, or circumscribed in any place, but because it is there that He especially manifests, and communicates his glory to the blessed angels and men.

It is called in Scripture *the new world, the new heaven, the heavenly Jerusalem, Paradise, Abraham's bosom*, and so on. This heaven is not everywhere, but above, and separate from earth, and hell.

Luke 16:26 And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us.

Is 66:1 This is what the LORD says: "Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool. Where is the house you will build for me? Where will my resting place be?"

It was in this heaven that Elijah was taken. From this the Holy Ghost came on the day of Pentecost. Paul calls it the third heaven (2 Cor 12:2). It is in this third signification that we are to understand it, when used to express the place to which Christ ascended.

Christ ascended, therefore, in that heaven which is the abode of the blessed. This is established by many and express testimonies from the word of God, such as the devil himself will never, to all eternity, be able to pervert.

Acts 1:9 After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight. They were looking intently up

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into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. "Men of Galilee," they said, "why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven."

John 14:2-4 In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. You know the way to the place where I am going.

Luke 24:51 While he was blessing them, he left them and was taken up into heaven.

Mark 16:19 After the Lord Jesus had spoken to them, he was taken up into heaven and he sat at the right hand of God.

Acts 7:56 "Look," he said, "I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God."

Col 3:1-2 Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.

Eph 4:10 He who descended is the very one who ascended higher than all the heavens, in order to fill the whole universe.

Heb 4:14 Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess.

Heb 7:26 Such a high priest meets our need--one who is holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners, exalted above the heavens.

Heb 9:24 For Christ did not enter a man-made sanctuary that was only a copy of the true one; he entered heaven itself, now to appear for us in God's presence.

Phil 3:20-21 But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, Who, by the power that

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enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.

Into this heaven, which is the abode of God and of the blessed, Christ ascended, and is now there, and will come from there to judge the world according to the testimony of the Word of God.

God made known to us to what place Christ ascended, so that...

1. It may be known that He continues to be true man and did not vanish away, but remains and will forever remain very man in heaven.
2. We may know to what place our thoughts should be directed, and where we ought to come in our approaches to Him, so as to avoid all forms of idolatry.
3. We may know our home, or the house into which Christ will bring us, and in which we shall dwell with him.

II. In what manner did He ascend?

1. Christ ascended into heaven according to his human nature. "The poor you will always have with you, but you will not always have me." (Matt 26:11)

Christ could not ascend to heaven with respect to His divine nature, for this was already in heaven before His ascension. Similarly, Christ didn't leave heaven with respect to His divinity when He was born into a human body. His Divinity does not depart from us in the Holy Spirit. It was, therefore, His human nature that ascended into heaven.

The Word made flesh did not sit in heaven before. When Christ's divinity is said to have descended, it must be understood that it manifested itself locally, and being of divine nature, it could properly manifest itself locally and remain in heaven. Before this it had not manifested itself locally.

2. He ascended locally and bodily, that is, he did truly pass from one place to another. He removed His human nature

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from a lower place to one that is higher – in heaven, by a transfer or change that was real and proper; which would not have been possible for him to have done if he had been everywhere in body.

That Christ did indeed ascend locally is proven by these declarations of Scripture: "You will always have the poor among you, but you will not always have me." (John 12:8)

John 16:7 "But I tell you the truth: It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you."

John 16:28 "I came from the Father and entered the world; now I am leaving the world and going back to the Father."

John 6:62 "What if you see the Son of Man ascend to where he was before!"

Col 3:1-2 "Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things."

Acts 1:2-9 "Until the day he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen. After his suffering, he showed himself to these men and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God. On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: "Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit." So when they met together, they asked him, "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?" He said to them: "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit

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comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight."

3. Christ ascended into heaven visibly for the ascent of his body into heaven was apparent to the sight of his disciples, who were witnesses of it. (Acts 1: 9) He was taken up until they could no longer see him. They saw him ascending until he went through a cloud after which they could no longer see him.

4. He ascended by His own power, that is to say, of His Godhead, by which He also rose from the dead.

John 20:17 Jesus said, "Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet returned to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, 'I am returning to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'"

John 14:3 "And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am."

Acts 2:33 "Exalted to the right hand of God, he has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear."

5. He ascended on the fortieth day after his resurrection. He ascended on the fortieth day and not sooner or later, or too soon after his resurrection, so that we may have infallible proof of his resurrection and the truth of His humanity, and that His church could be properly established.

Acts 1:3 After his suffering, he showed himself to these men and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God.

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He gave his disciples instruction in relation to His kingdom – recall to their recollection the things which He had done and spoken of before His death – so that they are properly established in the work of the church and also in the truth of his resurrection and humanity.

6. He ascended not to return until the Day of Judgment

Acts 1:11 ...This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven.

1Cor 11:26 For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

Acts 3:21 He must remain in heaven until the time comes for God to restore everything, as he promised long ago through his holy prophets.

OBJECTION:

If Christ's last degree of humiliation, His descent into hell, was a spiritual descent, then should we not also see his ascent as a spiritual ascend since these two opposites should be explained in the same manner?

No, the descent of Christ into hell and His ascent into heaven are not opposites. The ascension of Christ into heaven is not the highest degree of his glory, as his descent into hell was the last degree of his humiliation. The highest degree of Christ's glory is his sitting at the right hand of the father.

Scripture especially makes mention of his physical ascent so that it is unambiguous about the manner of His ascent and return. "He shall come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven." (Acts 1:11)

The descent into hell was a spiritual descent as we have shown earlier in this study.