

## LESSONS ON PREDESTINATION #71

"The Ascension: Biblical Data - Old Testament"  
(Scriptures from NKJV)

I Timothy 3:16:

***"And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifested in the flesh, Justified in the Spirit, Seen by angels, Preached among the Gentiles, Believed on in the world, Received up in glory."***

**INTRODUCTION:** We now are moving into the final stages of God's eternal purpose to put a man on His throne, to mediate and govern the affairs of heaven and earth. This man is none other but God's incarnate Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. We have covered His birth, His life, His death, His burial, and His resurrection. We now look at His ascension to the throne. The ascension, like His burial, has been sadly relegated to a sub-point of importance to that of His crucifixion and resurrection. This is most unfortunate in that it serves as the connecting link between His resurrection and enthronement. Much rich teachings become lost when the doctrine of the ascension is ignored or overlooked. It is a doctrine that is not denied by Biblical teachers, but is placed in a similar category as that of the Virgin Birth. Both are affirmed as true, but in practice are relegated to a place of minor importance. This should not be, and in this phase of our study on Predestination, we will seek to do justice to its importance. Among many other things, we will focus on:

- (1) Its significance for Christ Himself;
- (2) Its significance for Christian believers; and
- (3) Its significance for the angels.

If we ignore the ascension of Christ, we do not have a complete view of Christ. It is the consummation of His redemptive work.

### A. THE DOCTRINE DEFINED

1. **NOTE:** Our text in I Timothy 3:16 is believed to have been composed as a song which was sung in the early New Testament churches.

2. **Defined:** By the ascension of Christ it is meant the transferal of His resurrected body from this seen world on earth, into the unseen world, known as heaven. Luke is the only New Testament writer who described Jesus' ascension. Acts 1:9-12 pictures a scene in which Jesus was "**taken up**" and disappeared into a cloud. There we read, "**Now when He had spoken these things, while they watched, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as He went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel, who also said, 'Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven.'** Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which

***is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day's journey."*** In verse 12 along with Luke 24:50,51, we are told this occurred near Bethany, east of Jerusalem or the Mount of Olives. ***"And He led them out as far as Bethany, and He lifted up His hands and blessed them. Now it came to pass, while He blessed them, that He was parted from them and carried up into heaven."***

3. Its importance is seen in that it presents to us a living Christ. The Christ of the Gospels is the Christ of history, the Christ of the past, but the full New Testament picture of Christ is that of a living Christ, the Christ of heaven, the Christ of experience, the Christ of the present, and the Christ of the future. Because He lives, we shall live also.

The ascension of Jesus into heaven begins a new phase of the ministry of Christ. There as the God-man He serves as the Mediator between God and man. Up until this event, the angels had served in this capacity. Man, who was created a little lower than the angels, is now made higher than the angels in the Man, Christ Jesus. A whole new era of God's plan and purpose began with the enthronement of Christ, and along with this, emerged a new body of revelation revealed to men and angels. We must not think that the work of Christ for His people ended at His cross and resurrection. There is yet an ongoing work of Christ as Mediator and High Priest.

## **B. THE ASCENSION PREDICTED IN THE OLD TESTAMENT.**

We will now begin to examine some of the Biblical data found in the Old Testament relating to the ascension which is confirmed by the New Testament writers. We are operating on the principle of Biblical interpretation which affirms that the Old Testament must be interpreted by the New Testament and not vice versa. We begin first with:

1. Psalm 2:1-12 - ***"Why do the nations rage, and the people plot a vain thing? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord and against His Anointed, saying, 'Let us break their bonds in pieces and cast away their cords from us.' He who sits in the heavens shall laugh; The Lord shall hold them in derision. Then He shall speak to them in His wrath, and distress them in His deep displeasure: 'Yet I have set My King on My holy hill of Zion. I will declare the decree: The Lord has said to Me, 'You are My Son, today I have begotten You. Ask of Me, and I will give You the nations for Your inheritance, and the ends of the earth for Your possession. You shall break them with a rod of iron; You shall dash them to pieces like a potter's vessel.' Now therefore, be wise, O kings; be instructed, you judges of the earth. Serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling. Kiss the Son, lest He be angry, and you perish in the way,***

***when His wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all those who put their trust in Him."***

This is what is known as a Messianic Psalm, in that it concerns the Messiah.

a. Hebrews 1:5, 6; 5:5, 6. This is quoted by the writer of Hebrews, which I am inclined to be that of Paul. Time will not permit the debate regarding the topic. If you do not believe that Paul is the writer, then please be patient with me during this series of lessons. In Hebrews 1:5,6 we read,

***"For to which of the angels did He ever say: 'You are My Son, today I have begotten You'? And again: 'I will be to Him a Father, and He shall be to Me a Son'? But when He again brings the firstborn into the world, He says: 'Let all the angels of God worship Him.'"***

Paul, in affirming the superiority of Christ to that of the angels, quotes from the second Psalm. While the angels may be called ***"sons of God"*** (Job 1:6); 2:1; 38:7), the title ***"Son of God"*** has never been given to any angel.

Christ the Son of God is said to be ***"begotten"*** by the Father. This does not mean that He was created by the Father, but His begetting was of an eternal nature. The word, "begotten" refers to the eternal "Father-Son relationship, and that the Father sent the Son into the world. The Belgic Confession says "We believe that Jesus Christ . . . is the Son of God, not only from the time that He assumed our nature, but from all eternity." (Art. 10). The Athanasian Creed of the fourth century summarizes this in its twenty-first and twenty-second articles which read, "The Father is made of none, neither created nor begotten, the Son is of the Father alone; not made nor created, but begotten."

The word "today" in verse 6 can appear unclear in its meaning. What day is this? Simon Kistemaker sheds light upon the meaning when he says:

The word "Today" in verse 5 is not limited to designating a specific time, but ought to be understood in a broader sense. For example, the declaration of Christ's sonship was effective not only on the day of His resurrection, but also on the day of His ascension and His session on the right hand of God the Father (Hebrews 1:4) (Kistemaker, *Hebrews*, p. 40).

In verse 6 the word translated ***"firstborn"*** comes from a Greek word which can refer to either first in time or superiority in rank relating to honor and dignity. For example, I was my parents' firstborn child in that I preceded the births of my sister and brother. But Paul is using the word ***"firstborn"*** not in reference to an order in time, but to a position of superiority in rank. When the Father said to the Son in Psalm 2:7, ***"You are my Son, Today I have begotten you"*** He was not referring to a literal birth. Rather, He was

pointing to His Son being given a position of rank. God would later declare of His Son in Psalm 89:27, **"Also I will make Him My firstborn, the highest of the Kings of the earth."** Here **"firstborn"** clearly means being "supreme in rank" rather than "first in time." In other words, God would make His Son, as the Messiah, higher than all the other kings of the earth. Also, Hebrews has a similar message to His being superior to angels.

Now when did this occur? Hebrews 1:3, 4 gives us the answer. **"Who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, having become so much better than the angels, as He has by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they."** It was when He ascended up on high and sat down on the right hand of God on the throne of God. It was then He had the honor bestowed upon Him of that of a High Priest.

b. Hebrews 5:5 states it in this manner, **"So also Christ did not glorify Himself to become High Priest, but it was He who said to Him: 'You are My Son, today I have begotten You.'"**

2. Psalm 110:1-7 - There is a second example of the Old Testament predicting the ascension of Christ. It is found in Psalm 110:1-7 which reads, **"The Lord said to my Lord, 'Sit at My right hand, till I make Your enemies Your footstool.' The Lord shall send the rod of Your strength out of Zion. Rule in the midst of Your enemies! Your people shall be volunteers in the day of Your power; In the beauties of holiness, from the womb of the morning, You have the dew of Your youth. The Lord has sworn and will not relent, 'You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.' The Lord is at Your right hand; He shall execute kings in the day of His wrath. He shall judge among the nations, He shall fill the places with dead bodies, He shall execute the heads of many countries. He shall drink of the brook by the wayside; Therefore He shall lift up the head."** We are told this section of the Old Testament is the most frequently quoted by the New Testament writers. It is a Psalm of David. It sets forth the idea of a time in verses 1 and 2 when the Lord (who is God) says unto David's Lord (the Messiah) to come and sit on His right hand on the throne of God. This requires an ascension of the Messiah to that throne of authority. Whenever this occurs, the Messianic reign of the Messiah will begin. He will then rule from this place called Zion until all of His enemies are brought to the footstool of His judgment. It is for the first time in God's redemptive program that a Man will share the throne with God. There He will serve as a Priest-King; a priest to intercede for His people, and a king to rule over them. While there is a heavy use of military terms used in the 110<sup>th</sup> Psalm, when we come to the New Testament, both Jesus and the Apostles apply the language to the spiritual realm. Jesus

would say that His kingdom was not a kingdom enforced by physical military means, for if it was, His followers would fight. Instead it would be brought about by moral persuasion so as to produce a willing people.

a. This text is quoted by Paul in Hebrews 1:13 which reads, **"But to which of the angels has He ever said: 'Sit at My right hand, till I make Your enemies Your footstool?'"** It is quoted again in Hebrews 10:12, 13 which says, **"But this Man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down at the right hand of God, from that time waiting till His enemies are made His footstool."** In Hebrews 1:13 the question is asked "to what angels did God ever offer the place of favor and blessing in absolute sovereignty over His conquered enemies? To what angel was the office of king in the Messianic kingdom ever given?" This question reverts back to verse 3 when the Son was described as having **"sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high."**

Paul Wright gives this excellent description of what is taking place in Christ's ascension and exaltation to the right hand of God.

The warrant for understanding this text as a reference to the Son comes from Jesus Christ himself. In His confrontation with His enemies during Passion Week after He had turned all their trick questions back on them, He inquired of them, **"What think ye of Christ? whose son is he?"** (Matthew 22:42). After they replied that the Messiah was a descendant of David, Jesus asked how it could be that David called the Messiah "Lord" in Psalm 110:1. They of course did not reply. Logically, since the Messiah could be both "Lord" and a human descendant of David, He would have to be both God and man at the same time. This Psalm's implications for the Son are used here to underscore His exaltation, power, royal station, and sovereignty as supports for the superiority and finality of the divine revelation which centers in Him. At the same time, the idea that the Son is now sitting in heaven waiting for His ultimate victory is introduced. (Wright, Hebrews, *The Complete Biblical Library*, p. 27, para. 2).

b. Acts 2:34-36. In Acts 2:34-36 we read, **"For David did not ascend into the heavens, but he says himself: 'The Lord said to my Lord, Sit at My right hand, Till I make Your enemies Your footstool.' Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ."** This is used by Peter in his sermon on the day of Pentecost to establish the resurrection and ascension of Jesus to His throne. NOTE: The expression in verse 34, **"David did not ascend into the heavens."** Some have used this text to teach "soul sleep" by saying that David's soul is in an unconscious state, and he is not yet in heaven with the departed saints. This is not Peter's topic. He is saying that David was not talking about himself in Psalm 110, but about his Lord ascending to His position on His throne. David was never honored by the right to ascend to the right hand of God, but His Lord was the only One to be so honored.

3. Psalm 16:8-11 - There is a third example of the Old Testament predicting the ascension of Christ. It is found in Psalm 16:8-11 which reads, **"I have set the Lord always before me; because He is at my right hand I shall not be moved. Therefore my heart is glad, and my glory rejoices; My flesh also will rest in hope. For You will not leave my soul in Sheol, nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption. You will show me the path of life; In Your presence is fullness of joy; at Your right hand are pleasures forevermore."**

a. This is a prophecy given by David, who was a prophet as well as a king. David is not talking about himself, but about the Messiah to come.

b. This is verified by Peter in Acts 2:25-33 which reads, **"For David says concerning Him: 'I foresaw the Lord always before my face, for He is at my right hand, that I may not be shaken. Therefore my heart rejoiced, and my tongue was glad; Moreover my flesh also will rest in hope. For You will not leave my soul in Hades, nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption. You have made known to me the ways of life; You will make me full of joy in Your presence.'** 'Men and brethren, let me speak freely to you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. Therefore, being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that of the fruit of his body, according to the flesh, He would raise up the Christ to sit on his throne, he, foreseeing this, spoke concerning the resurrection of the Christ, that His soul was not left in Hades, nor did His flesh see corruption. This Jesus God has raised up, of which we are all witnesses. Therefore being exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He poured out this which you now see and hear.'"

(1) The Messiah would enter into His glory after He had first suffered, died and risen from the dead. This is what the disciples had not been able to piece together. How could He be enthroned as Lord, if He died? Jesus opened their eyes with the words He gave to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus. In Luke 24:25-27, He says, **"O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into His glory? And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself."**

(2) Peter explains to the ones who had crucified Christ that Jesus was risen from the dead, ascended to His throne, and the era of the Messianic kingdom and reign had already been inaugurated. **"God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified,**

**both Lord and Christ.”** (Acts 2:36). The Messianic reign of Christ begins, not at some point in the future at His second coming, but when He ascended to His throne some forty days after His resurrection!

4. Psalm 68:18. There is a fourth example of the Old Testament predicting the ascension of Christ. It is found in Psalm 68:18 which reads, **“You have ascended on high, You have led captivity captive; You have received gifts among men, even from the rebellious, that the Lord God might dwell there.”**

a. This is quoted and interpreted by Paul in Ephesians 4:8-10 - **“Therefore He says: ‘When He ascended on high, He led captivity captive, and gave gifts to men.’ (Now this, “He ascended”—what does it mean but that He also first descended into the lower parts of the earth? He who descended is also the One who ascended far above all the heavens, that He might fill all things.)”**

b. These verses are difficult to understand. Time will not permit us to examine them in a thorough manner. Perhaps we can enlarge upon them when we cover Paul’s writings dealing with the ascension.

(1) Let us look first at the terms **“ascended”** and **“descended.”** Paul applies Psalm 68 to the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ. Ascended refers to Jesus’ ascension from earth to heaven (Acts 1:9-11). He ascended from earth to heaven to begin His reign with His Father on the throne of God. Paul then explains that if He ascended, He must first descend. If ascend refers to His being taken up to heaven, then descend must refer to His coming down from heaven to earth. This He did in His incarnation, His being formed as a man in the womb of the virgin.

(2) The expression **“the lower parts of the earth”** complicates the interpretation. Some believe this is a reference to hell. I believe it is best to apply it to the incarnate life of Jesus as a man rather than to a particular place. It would then cover the entirety of Jesus’ life here on earth. John MacArthur gives a summary of how the expression is used in other passages. He writes:

To understand the phrase “the lower parts of the earth” we need only to examine its use elsewhere in Scripture. In Psalm 63:9, it has to do with death, being related to falling by the sword. In Matthew 12:40, a similar phrase “the heart of the earth” refers to the belly of a great fish where the prophet Jonah was kept. In Isaiah 44:23 the phrase refers to the created earth. Psalm 139:15 uses it in reference to the womb of a woman where God is forming a child. The sum of these uses indicates that the phrase relates to the created earth as a place of life and death. In the majority of the uses it appears in contrast to the highest heavens. (MacArthur, *New Testament Commentary - Ephesians*, p. 151).

(3) The expression **"He led captivity captive"** is also complex and open to various interpretations. Does it mean that in Christ's ascension that He led His enemies (Satan, sin, suffering, and death) into captivity who had held His people captive, or did Paul mean that Jesus through His redemptive work set His people free from captivity to their enemies? The debate is ongoing and has not been resolved during the two thousand years of New Testament interpretations. Perhaps a compromise can be reached whereby both interpretations can be held.

(4) The background for the expression is seen historically in this manner. After a king had won a significant military victory, he would bring back the spoils of war. This would include enemy prisoners to be put on display before his people in a military parade. However, if there were any of his own soldiers who had been captured by the enemy, the king would put them on display also. These were often called recaptured captives, that is, prisoners of war who now have their freedom restored. It was a great honor for the king to release their captives. This approach allows both views to be held.

(5) Paul pictures Christ as having conquered Satan's kingdom and taken him captive, and in the process had redeemed and set free His chosen people from the power of the world, the flesh, and the devil. Whatever the meaning of the expression, **"descended into the lowest parts of the earth"** means, it must not be permitted to distract from Paul's focus, that being the ascension of Jesus Christ back into heaven, having been victorious in the Battle of the Cross. It is there as a victorious captain that He rules the universe as King of kings and Lord of lords.