

LESSONS ON PREDESTINATION #72

"The Ascension: Biblical Data - New 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: This will be the second in a series of lessons on the topic of the Ascension of Jesus Christ. I Timothy 3:16 is the theme text. This is supposedly taken from a hymn composed in the early church, and we read in verse 16 these words: ***"Without controversy great is the mystery of godliness:"*** Then Paul explains what that mystery or that complex series of events contains. He says, ***"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."*** We are taking our topic from the last phrase, He was ***"received up in glory"*** – or "His ascension."

We saw last week that by the ascension of Christ is meant the transferal of the resurrected body of Jesus from this seen world into the world of the unseen known as heaven among other terms. And the transferal of Christ's body into heaven resulted in the exaltation of Christ to the presence of the Father in glory after His resurrection from the dead. As I pointed out last week, it has been my observation that in much contemporary and historical gospel preaching, this phase of the gospel is rather neglected. It is sort of taken for granted, but quite often it is not thoroughly appreciated on the part of God's people as to what took place in the ascension of Jesus. We speak of His death, His burial, His resurrection, but we do not speak often enough on his ascension, yet that is where He is exalted as Lord over all.

We now wish to move to the New Testament and examine the data found therein. We would desire to go through all the divisions contained in the New Testament and cover each reference, but that would consume too much time. So instead we are going to select certain references out of each division, and examine them. The various divisions which refer to the ascension of Christ are: The Gospels, The Acts of the Apostles, The Writings of Paul, The Book of Hebrews, The Writings of Peter and John in the Epistles, and The Book of Revelation. We will begin first with:

A. THE GOSPELS.

1. John 6:58-62 - ***"This is the bread which came down from heaven—not as your fathers ate the manna, and are dead. He who eats this bread will live forever.' These things He said in the synagogue as He taught in Capernaum. Therefore***

many of His disciples, when they heard this, said, 'This is a hard saying; who can understand it?' When Jesus knew in Himself that His disciples complained about this, He said to them, 'Does this offend you? What then if you should see the Son of Man ascend where He was before?'" Here we have Jesus specifically using the term, **"ascension."** This is taken from the controversial sermon of Jesus being the **"Bread of Life."** Jesus claims that He had come down from heaven and that He planned on ascending back to heaven. He was teaching that He pre-existed with His Father before He descended into the world of mankind. Thus, He was God, and now He acquired the nature of a man. Thus, when He ascended back to His Father, He would be known not only as the Son of God, but also as the Son of Man. In this procedure, He never ceased to maintain His divine nature as God, but He acquired the human nature of a man. This was an offensive claim which led to a large number of His disciples leaving to follow Him no more. In verse 66 we read, **"from that time many of His disciples went back and walked with Him no more."**

2. John 17:4,5 - **"I have glorified You on the earth. I have finished the work which You have given Me to do. And now, O Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was."** Here, Jesus claims to have had a pre-existing glory. Now when He comes into this world, He lays aside the visible manifestation of that glory (cf. Philippians 2:5-11) and we see primarily His humanity. He is humiliated, suffers death, and God raises Him from the dead and exalts Him to His own right hand. There He is given a name which is above every name that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow and every tongue should confess to the glory of God that "He is Lord." So when Jesus asked for the Father to glorify Him, He was anticipating a time in which He was going to ascend and return to the state of glory which He occupied with the Father before the created order was ever put in place. Only this time, He would bring with Him, His newly acquired humanity. That is quite a concept!

B. THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES.

1. Acts 1:8-11 - **"But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.' 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.'"** The account given here by Luke is the clearest we have of the ascension of Christ. After His resurrection, Jesus

appeared to many people in many places and taught them many things concerning the nature of His kingdom. He did so during a forty-day period of time. Acts 1:2,3 informs us that, "**until the day in which He was taken up, after He through the Holy Spirit had given commandments to the apostles whom He had chosen, to whom He also presented Himself alive after His suffering by many infallible proofs, being seen by them during forty days and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God.**" He also informed them of the soon fulfillment of the Father's promise to send forth the ministry of the Holy Spirit, who would bring forth the power needed for the world-wide ministry, spreading forth from Jerusalem into all the Gentile lands. This would be the beginning of the fulfillment of the Great Commission (Acts 1:4-8).

It is while the disciples were listening to Him, His body was taken upward until He disappeared in a cloud out of their sight. As they continued to look upward, two angelic messengers in human form explained to them that the same manner in which they had seen Him ascend into heaven, He would descend back to the earth at some future time.

2. Sermons and speeches in Acts.

The sermons and speeches recorded in the Acts reveal that the essence of the Apostles' preaching was that the same Jesus who went about doing good and mighty deeds, and who died in accordance with God's redemptive plan, was raised from the dead (of which the Apostles and many others were eye-witnesses - Acts 2:32; I Corinthians 15:4-8), is now ascended into heaven, where He is seated on His throne in His kingdom at the Father's right hand. It is from there that He reigns with all authority and power until all of His enemies shall be subdued under His feet (I Corinthians 15:24,25). "**The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death.**" (I Corinthians 15:26). This shall occur in the resurrection of all the dead when He descends in bodily manner as He was taken up into heaven.

The Apostles did not separate the resurrection from the ascension. They did not preach the death of Christ. They preached a living Lord on a throne who got there by means of a cross. Before a person can call upon the Lord for forgiveness of sins, he must acknowledge His Lordship over him. Jesus Himself had said, "**why do you call me Lord, Lord, and not do the things that I say?**" (Luke 6:46).

Here are some of the sermons in Acts which set forth the ascension of Christ.

First, Acts 2:29-36 - Peter's sermon on the day of Pentecost.

Second, Acts 3:18-21 - Peter's sermon in the temple.

Third, Acts 7:54-56 - Stephen's speech before the Jewish council.

Fourth, Acts 9:3-6 - Paul's conversion on the road to Damascus (cf. I Corinthians 15:8). NOTE: Paul was arrested by the King!

Fifth, Acts 22:6-11 - Paul's testimony before the multitude in Jerusalem.

Sixth, Acts 26:12-19 - Paul's defense before King Agrippa.

NOTE: All of these passages set forth the present life and activity of Jesus Christ on His throne in heaven.

C. PAUL'S WRITINGS.

NOTE: Paul's personal experience with Christ started with His recognition of Jesus as the ascended Lord as recorded in the book of Acts. In Acts 9:1-6 we read, ***"Then Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and asked letters from him to the synagogues of Damascus, so that if he found any who were of the Way, whether men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. As he journeyed he came near Damascus, and suddenly a light shone around him from heaven. Then he fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to him, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?' And he said, 'Who are You, Lord?' Then the Lord said, 'I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. It is hard for you to kick against the goads.' So he, trembling and astonished, said, 'Lord, what do You want me to do?' Then the Lord said to him, 'Arise and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do.'"***

For the present, we will confine our research to Paul's letter to the Ephesians. In Ephesians Paul especially emphasizes the significance of the ascension.

1. Ephesians 1:15-23 - ***"Therefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, do not cease to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers: that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come. And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all."*** In this passage,

God's work, produced by Christ, is shown to extend much further than the resurrection, in that Christ was enabled to **"sit at His own right hand in the heavenly places."** This constituted Christ as the supreme authority over all things with a special role to the church of which He is its head.

2. Ephesians 2:4-7 - **"But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus."** The idea here is that through our spiritual union with Christ, we are so united to Him that all the benefits which He acquired for us are dispensed by Him to us from His mediatorial throne in heaven. This is the meaning of His ascension.

3. Ephesians 4:7-12 - **"But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift. 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.) And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ."** Here the ascension finds its most clear and complete expression in that it is connected with the gift of Christ as being the crowning feature of His work. For the benefit of mankind, Christ dispenses gifted men to perfect the saints, through the work of the teaching ministry, so as to edify the church, which is His body.

D. HEBREWS.

1. The book of Hebrews contains more recorded data or information about the ascension and intercession of Christ, and their significance than any other book in the New Testament. These are central to the theme of Hebrews.

2. Hebrews 1:1-3 - **"God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds; 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."** Here the fact of His ascension to a position of supreme authority is clearly stated. This occurred after His

sacrificial death on the cross.

3. Hebrews 1:4-8; 1:13-14; 2:5-9 - Here are several verses which address the topic:

1:4-8: ***"Having become so much better than the angels, as He has by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they. 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.' And of the angels He says: 'Who makes His angels spirits and His ministers a flame of fire.' But to the Son He says: 'Your throne, O God, is forever and ever; A scepter of righteousness is the scepter of Your kingdom.'"***

1:13-14: ***"But to which of the angels has He ever said: 'Sit at My right hand, till I make Your enemies Your footstool'? Are they not all ministering spirits sent forth to minister for those who will inherit salvation?"***

2:5-9: ***"For He has not put the world to come, of which we speak, in subjection to angels. But one testified in a certain place, saying: 'What is man that You are mindful of him,' or the son of man that You take care of him? You have made him a little lower than the angels; You have crowned him with glory and honor, and set him over the works of Your hands. You have put all things in subjection under his feet.' For in that He put all in subjection under him, He left nothing that is not put under him. But now we do not yet see all things put under him. But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, for the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, that He, by the grace of God, might taste death for everyone."***

Christ's ascension to His mediatorial throne at the right hand of God elevates Him to a position to that of the God-Man. He now occupies the place of authority and honor held by the angels until He was crowned with glory and honor. I Timothy 2:5 says, ***"For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus."***

4. Hebrews 5:5-10 - It was upon His being seated at God's right hand that He began His intercessory work for His people. In Hebrews 5:5-10 we are told, ***"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.' As He also says in another place: 'You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek'; who, in the days of His flesh,***

when He had offered up prayers and supplications, with vehement cries and tears to Him who was able to save Him from death, and was heard because of His godly fear, though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered. And having been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him, called by God as High Priest 'according to the order of

Melchizedek,'" As God, He can represent the interests of a Holy God. As Man, He can represent the interests of sinful men. There are no higher intercessors than Jesus Christ. We now have a direct access unto Him, and need not any lower intercessors under Him in which we must first go through. This eliminates the entire Roman Catholic system of sacrifice and intercessors in the forms of Mary and the priests. As long as Jesus remains alive and seated on His throne as a King-Priest, the souls of those for whom He is interceding are safe from condemnation.

5. Hebrews 8:1, 2. In Hebrews 8:1, 2, Paul would summarize the main theme of Christ's mediatorial work. There we read, ***"Now this is the main point of the things we are saying: We have such a High Priest, who is seated at 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 erected, and not man."*** So Christ is an eternal High Priest, as well as a reigning Lord.

E. PETER AND JOHN'S WRITINGS.

1. Peter's writings - I Peter 3:21, 22 - ***"There is also an antitype which now saves us—baptism (not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God), through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, angels and authorities and powers having been made subject to Him."***

a. This is the only reference to the ascension to be found in Peter's Epistles.
b. He, Christ, is said to have been resurrected from the dead.
c. He is then said to have gone or ascended into heaven.
d. There He is now at the right hand of God.
e. Angels are now subject to His humanity ("authorities and powers" - ranks of angels).

f. The context of I Peter is that of suffering as a believer. In I Peter 2:20-23 we are told, ***"For what credit is it if, when you are beaten for your faults, you take it patiently? But when you do good and suffer, if you take it patiently, this is commendable before God. For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps: 'Who committed no***

sin, nor was deceit found in His mouth'; who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously. Peter exhorts those who suffer to consider Christ, who also suffered and died, but was raised from the dead, and is now at God's right hand. Christ's highest victory followed His period of greatest suffering. This serves as a pattern and guarantee of the Christian's glorification after enduring a period of persecution and suffering. In Revelation 3:21 we are told, ***"To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne."***

2. John's writings.

a. John does not make any reference to Christ's actual ascension in his letters of I, II, and III John. However in I John 2:1, he does say that believers ***"have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous."*** The word "Advocate" is the same as "Comforter" in John 14:16.

b. The Book of Revelation.

(1) Revelation 1:1 - ***"The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show His servants—things which must shortly take place. And He sent and signified it by His angel to His servant John."*** The word "revelation" means "disclosure." It is like the opening of an envelope disclosing what has been enclosed within it. The Revelation of Jesus Christ is a disclosure exposing the nature of His Person and the activity of His work. It is not primarily a manual to enable the church to understand the chronological order of future events. Instead it reveals the Lord Jesus Christ ruling in His churches and in the midst of His enemies. Though He has much opposition, He still sovereignly controls all the affairs of history. In his encounter with an angel in Revelation 19:10, John gives us the key to interpret the book when he says, ***"And I fell at his feet to worship him. But he said to me, 'See that you do not do that! I am your fellow servant, and of your brethren who have the testimony of Jesus. Worship God! For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy."***

(2) The book describes the living Christ, who had died, but is now alive, and is in heaven ruling as the Lion from the tribe of Judah, while He conquers like a lamb which gives away its life. His being in heaven is descriptive of a spiritual state of existence unseen by the natural eyes of physical creatures here on earth. Nevertheless, it is a real place, just as real to the inhabitants there, as earth is real to its inhabitants. It is from this state and place that He is exercising a ruling influence in the affairs and lives of those in heaven and on earth. In other words He is influencing both the spiritual world of

the unseen and the physical world of the seen.

He is shown to be working in the churches here on earth, and working in the daily affairs of the world. He is maintaining a sovereign providence which is moving toward a grand climax in which He will reappear in bodily form at His Second Coming.

This Christ who had lived, died and rose again, is coming again. This shows that such a picture or revelation (disclosure) necessarily involves His prior ascension.