

# He Has Ascended!

## (Acts 1:1-11)

05/15/10

(I am indebted to Witsius on the *Apostles Creed* and to Swete *The Ascension* for some of these thoughts.)<sup>1</sup>

### Introduction

Though the Ascension was believed, it was never preached in the circles in which I grew up and was originally trained. The Ascension presents Christ as ruling **now**, but the way I was taught, His kingship was reserved for the so-called millennium. But the whole Church, Orthodoxy, Roman Catholicism, and Protestantism as a whole, has preached it for 2,000 years and that He is King **now**. So let us consider the Ascension of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Our culture is in a moral free fall. Is it too late to turn things around? It is not too late if Jesus is ruling as the sovereign King of the world!

We read:

“I am the First and the Last: I am He that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death.” (See Rev. 1:7; 2:8.)

Since death could not conquer Him, it was fitting that He should ascend to the place of everlasting life, not subject to corruption and death anymore!

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<sup>1</sup> I use underlining, bold, and colors to help me preach. In other words, I do not make a separate copy of the sermon just for reading.

## Ascension / 2

**What if He had stayed on earth?** How would He have reigned and where? What would that have said about the Father's acceptance of His death and resurrection? The Ascension was the Father's "Amen" to His "It is finished!" It was the explanation of His holy character, the fulfillment of His own prophecy. The Ascension says that sin was mastered, death was dead, man was free, and Jesus was Lord. He has fulfilled all the prophecies, types, and shadows of the Old Testament.

The human life of Christ can be divided into **two parts**: (1) His life on earth from His Virgin Birth to His bodily resurrection, and (2) His life in heaven from His Ascension, being seated in favor at the right hand of the majesty on high, and His current session as He rules everyone as King, intercedes as the high priest for His Church, and by His Spirit reveals who He is as **THE** final prophet who came into the world.

### **I. The Ascension, WHAT**

Ascension refers to the human body of Jesus, to His glorified body and human soul being removed from the earth to heaven, to sit at the Father's right hand, until the Last Day judgment. This is **not** a literal sitting, but the metaphor says that His cross-work on earth is over, done, perfect, never to be repeated, and now His work in heaven begins and continues.

Ascension does **not** refer to His deity going to heaven as it was already there (John 3:13), but to His humanity ascending. He ascended by His and the Father's omnipotent power, somehow enabling a glorified body to be immediately in heaven. (We are never told how miracles are done.)

## Ascension / 3

When Christ descended, He did not bring flesh as this He received from the Virgin Mary, but this refers to His condescending; that is, His adding to His perfect deity the perfect humanity of His incarnation. But further consider:

- Christ is now **the ark of the covenant** in heaven for us. He is the **shekinah glory** who entered the temple. He is the **temple** so that neither Israel nor the Church is to search for a temple made with hands but the one made without hands.
- His blood is presented in heaven for us—not as literally poured out for that was done on the Cross—but in His humanity, in His person it is presented, and He also now and forever intercedes for us at His Father’s right hand.
- Ascension means that He is our High Priest forever and that we enter heaven now in worship through Him and personally when we die. Death, therefore, is our friend.

The Ascension is His coronation, and do not miss the fact that “**two men**” dressed in white were talking to the Apostles as He Ascended, for these are His angels, and two is the number of witness, for “by the mouth of two or three witnesses every fact shall be established.”

And of great importance is the little detail that “a cloud received Him out of their sight.” If you look up the references for “cloud” (generally in the singular) in the Old Testament historical books and prophets, you’ll find that it is both literal but also especially symbolic of the covenantal presence of God

## Ascension / 4

for His people. The cloud was the glory of God, and also most likely composed of myriads of angelic beings. When the early church pictured the Ascension, they nearly always showed the cloud with angelic beings, for they understood its significance better than we today. The cloud can range from His gracious presence to His judgment, but it is very significant: Consider these references. First, His unilateral covenant with all mankind:

<sup>13</sup> "I set My rainbow in the cloud, and it shall be for the sign of the covenant between Me and the earth. <sup>14</sup> It shall be, when I bring a cloud over the earth, that the rainbow shall be seen in the cloud; <sup>15</sup> and I will remember My covenant which is between Me and you and every living creature of all flesh; the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh. <sup>16</sup> The rainbow shall be in the cloud, and I will look on it to remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth" (Gen 9:13-16).

Other references:

<sup>21</sup> And the LORD went before them by day in a pillar of cloud to lead the way, and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, so as to go by day and night. <sup>22</sup> He did not take away the pillar of cloud by day or the pillar of fire by night *from* before the people (Ex 13:21-22).

<sup>10</sup> Now it came to pass, as Aaron spoke to the whole congregation of the children of Israel, that they looked toward the wilderness, and behold, the glory of the LORD appeared in the cloud. <sup>11</sup> And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, <sup>12</sup> "I have heard the complaints of the children of Israel. Speak to them, saying, 'At twilight you shall eat

## Ascension / 5

meat, and in the morning you shall be filled with bread. And you shall know that I am the LORD your God'" (Ex 16:10-12).

<sup>16</sup> Then it came to pass on the third day, in the morning, that there were thunderings and lightnings, and a thick **cloud** on the mountain; and the sound of the trumpet was very loud, so that all the people who were in the camp trembled (Ex 19:16).

And Moses was the human type of Christ more than anyone else in the Old Testament, and His "Ascension" of Mt Sinai to receive the law and the tabernacle instructions typified Christ:

<sup>15</sup> Then Moses went up into the mountain, and a **cloud** covered the mountain. <sup>16</sup> Now the glory of the LORD rested on Mount Sinai, and the **cloud** covered it six days. And on the seventh day He called to Moses out of the midst of the **cloud**. <sup>17</sup> The sight of the glory of the LORD was like a consuming fire on the top of the mountain in the eyes of the children of Israel. <sup>18</sup> So Moses went into the midst of the **cloud** and went up into the mountain. And Moses was on the mountain forty days and forty nights (Ex 24:15-18).

And in the New Testament:

<sup>34</sup> While he was saying this, a **cloud** came and overshadowed them; and they were fearful as they entered the **cloud**. <sup>35</sup> And a voice came out of the **cloud**, saying, "This is My beloved Son. Hear Him!" (Luke 9:34-35).

<sup>27</sup> "Then they will see the Son of Man coming in a **cloud** with power and great glory" (Luke 21:27).

## Ascension / 6

<sup>1</sup> Moreover, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware that all our fathers were under the **cloud**, all passed through the sea, <sup>2</sup> all were baptized into Moses in the **cloud** and in the sea, <sup>3</sup> all **ate** the same spiritual food, <sup>4</sup> and all **drank** the same spiritual drink. **For they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ** (1 Cor 10:1-4).

**Application:** Do you have loved ones who have died in the Lord? Their union with Him through the Church in His Ascension guarantees that they are with Him as we speak. Taking Holy Communion now is done in communion with all the saints in heaven. Consider that your loved ones are experiencing joy beyond our imagination, for Paul said: **“Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him”** (1 Cor 2:9).

## II. The Ascension, WHEN

The **number forty** is very significant in the Bible, often referring to a period of testing. After 40 days, Joseph and Mary brought Him to the temple, where Mary received purification according to the law (Luke 2:22; Lev 12:2-6).

Elijah went 40 days after God fed and ministered to him as a type of Christ. Israel was disobedient and had to wander 40 years in the desert, but the true Israel, even Jesus, was in the wilderness 40 days (Matt. 4:1ff with Deut. 8:1ff), being tempted by the devil in person, but overcame for you and for me. Then after 40 days He ascended into heaven for us, having been subjected to all the temptations of this life and over-

## Ascension / 7

come them all. **HE HAS ASCENDED BECAUSE THE PERIOD OF TESTING IS OVER.**

The important point is that He takes His righteousness into heaven for us, after having been tested forty days in the desert and having died on the Cross for our sins.

**APPLICATION:** When our “40 years” are over, we shall ascend also to be with the Lord, and “so shall we ever be with the Lord” (1 Thess 4:17).

### III. The Ascension, WHY

(1) The Ascension says that a Man, the Second Man, the Second Adam, now rules the world, much to the chagrin of Satan, who thought he could conquer the world by causing the first man to fall into sin. Now the Second Man has defeated him, and the Ascension confirms that defeat.

The Old Testament had been predicting the coming of one who would crush the head of the serpent, and we have pictures of that one to come. For example, “**Enoch** walked with God ; and he was not, for God took him” (Gen 5:24), and as Hebrews 11:5 says: “By faith Enoch was taken away so that he did not see death.”

Moreover, in the case of Elijah, we have one who just appeared on the scene without any notice of his birth (like the Son of God and Melchizedek), and then at his end we see him commissioning Elisha, talking with him, and then suddenly taken up in a fiery chariot: “Then it happened, as they continued on and talked, that suddenly a chariot of fire *appeared* with horses of fire, and separated the two of them; and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven” (2 Kings 2:11).

## Ascension / 8

And did the same happened with Christ? He was talking with His disciples:

<sup>50</sup> And He led them out as far as Bethany, and He lifted up His hands and blessed them. <sup>51</sup> Now it came to pass, while He blessed them, that He was parted from them and carried up into heaven (Luke 24:50-51).

<sup>9</sup> Now when He had spoken these things, while they watched, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight (Acts 1:9).

**The Ascension is a recognition by the Father that He is well pleased with His Son, that His redemption is acceptable to Him, that He is to be crowned with glory and honor, that all authority in heaven and on earth is given to Him, that He is now King of kings and Lord of lords (Psalm 2)!**

(2) He loves His people and is preparing a place for them:

"Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also. And where I go you know, and the way you know." Thomas said to Him, "Lord, we do not know where You are going, and how can we know the way?" Jesus said to him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me" (John 14:1-6).

Heaven must receive Him "until the times of the restitution of all things" (Acts 3:21).

## Ascension / 9

His ascension is not just a glorifying of His physical body, but a literal passing into the heavens for us. His body is locally present there and nowhere else, and He is waiting for us!

(3) Moreover, He is there as our **High Priest**. Even as in the Old Testament the High Priest entered the veil once a year with the shed blood of a victim so Christ has entered once for all with His own blood. In contrast to the Old Covenant High Priest who had to do this every year and thus could never sit down since his work was never done, the glorious High Priest, even Jesus the Lord, ascended and sat down! **His work is done!**

Even further, He makes **intercession** for us forever, having entered not into holy places made with hands, but into the heavenly sanctuary made without hands, to consecrate the way for us by making continual intercession for us! There He is the final priest whose blood is eternally effectual and who ever lives to make intercession for His people (Heb. 7:25).

**He has now entered His eternal rest, waiting for us who shall also enter an eternal rest after we have suffered a little while.**

Since He Himself is the true tabernacle, He had to ascend there to be our High Priest, where the true tabernacle is made without hands. There is now no earthly sanctuary, and no literal one in heaven, but Jesus is in the presence of God as the living tabernacle.

In the Old Testament system, the high priest could only enter the glory of God's presence once a year, but now Christ **IS** the glory of God. He was such in His incarnation (**John 1:14**), at His transfiguration, and especially now:

## Ascension / 10

<sup>15</sup> which He will manifest in His own time, *He who is* the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings and Lord of lords, <sup>16</sup> who alone has immortality, dwelling in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see, to whom *be* honor and everlasting power. Amen (1 Tim 6:15-16).

Can you imagine being in heaven—or on earth in the eternal state—and someone says to you, “Let’s go see the glory of God.” And you’ll go see Jesus!

(4) There He is the **final prophet** who instructs His people by His Spirit through His Word. The Holy Spirit reveals Christ to the world, not the antichrist or something else, according to our passage for today. Hebrews 1:1-2:

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.

To put this another way, all revelation about God is mediated through Christ, not through Mary or others. He is the final prophet, the final revelation of the Father, so that the one who has seen Him has seen the Father.

(5) He is there ruling the world for His Church. **On earth He brought the kingdom of God as the reigning King**, as foretold by Daniel the prophet:

<sup>34</sup> “You watched while a stone was cut out without hands, which struck the image on its feet of iron and clay, and broke them in pieces. <sup>35</sup> Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver, and the gold were

## Ascension / 11

crushed together, and became like chaff from the summer threshing floors; the wind carried them away so that no trace of them was found. And the stone that struck the image became a great mountain and filled the whole earth (Dan 2:34-35).

<sup>44</sup> And in the days of these kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed; and the kingdom shall not be left to other people; it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever. <sup>45</sup> Inasmuch as you saw that the stone was cut out of the mountain without hands, and that it broke in pieces the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver, and the gold—he great God has made known to the king what will come to pass after this. The dream is certain, and its interpretation is sure” (Daniel 2:44-45).

<sup>13</sup> “I was watching in the night visions, and behold, *One* like the Son of Man, coming with the clouds of heaven! He came to the Ancient of Days, and they brought Him near before Him. <sup>14</sup> Then to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and His kingdom *the one* which shall not be destroyed” (Daniel 7:13-14).

And the Apostle Paul stated:

<sup>23</sup> But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those *who are* Christ’s at His

## Ascension / 12

coming.<sup>24</sup> Then *comes* the end, when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power.<sup>25</sup> For He must reign till He has put all enemies under His feet.<sup>26</sup> The last enemy *that* will be destroyed *is* death (1 Cor 15:23-26).

Where is the kingdom of Nebuchadnezzar and of the rebuilt kingdom of Nebuchadnezzar by Sadam Hussein? Where is the kingdom of Media-Persia? Where is the kingdom of Greece? Where is the kingdom of Rome? Where is Nero, the Caesar who murdered the Apostle Paul? People now name their sons Paul and their dogs Nero! And what has happened to the kingdom of Christ? It has grown from 12 men to the largest religion in the world. Nations shall come and go. Religions shall come and go, such as Islam, but **“The kingdoms of this world have become *the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever!*”** (Rev 11:15). Our sovereign Lord Christ reigns now from heaven as King of kings and Lord of lords. There is nothing that can stay His hand! He makes one nation perish and another one rise. There is no human who can overcome Him or His people, for He has ascended beyond the reach of anyone!

There He is the final king who rules the universe with omnipotence as symbolized by His glorified humanity (though His humanity is real and local). From His throne He laughs at those who would dare to rebel against Him (Ps. 2).

Do you recall the **two spies** who went into the Promised Land and came back with a bad report? In their unbelief they compared themselves with their enemies instead of contrast-

## Ascension / 13

ing their enemies with the Lord God Almighty. Likewise, today people say that this world is Satan's, that we cannot win, and they manifest the unbelief of the two spies.

But why in heaven? Why rule from there where we cannot see Him? Because there nothing can touch Him, and there He receives His saints into His glorious presence, having prepared a home for them that is so glorious that Paul says:

<sup>9</sup> But as it is written: "Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him" (1 Cor 2:9).

If this was all there was, right now here on earth, it would be a great disappointment, but the Lord will give us that which is so far beyond what we can imagine. Then at His Second Coming, we'll have the earth thrown in as the final resting place for the saints.

### Conclusion

Let us rejoice in so great **salvation** as God has given to us in His glorified, ascended Son. Let us, therefore, run to Him for our salvation and hope.

Let us rejoice in the **communion of the saints**, that we shall be with our loved ones in Christ in a short while.

Let us rejoice that the **Church is unconquerable**, for we have a Lord who overcame death and who now, right now, is King of kings, and Lord of lords. The secular world in the USA hates Christians and anything Christian, but what is our response? They are attacking us with an unholy vengeance. Too bad, we win. **AMEN!**