

DOCTRINE OF THE ASCENSIONS AND SESSION OF CHRIST

June 7, 1994

I. Preliminary considerations.

- A. This doctrine will show that Christ ascended twice to the Father.
- B. This doctrine will demonstrate Christ's present work at the right hand of the Father.
- C. This doctrine presupposes Christ's literal, physical, bodily resurrection from the dead.

II. Evidence for two ascensions into heaven.

- A. On the day of Christ's resurrection (Sunday, April 5, 33AD), He ascended the first time privately based on:
 - 1. The strict reading of Ps.2:7 "*I (Messiah/Christ) will surely tell of the decree of the LORD (Father): He said to Me, 'You are My Son, today (not 40 days later) I have begotten You'*" (a reference to Jesus' resurrection from the dead, cf. Act.13:30-34 and Rom.1:4, which two citations make it abundantly clear that Jesus was "*begotten*" via resurrection from the dead. He was begotten as a man via the miracle of the virgin birth; cf. Heb.1:6; Jn.1:14).
 - 2. The natural reading of Jn.20:17 (*Jesus said to her, "Stop clinging to Me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to My brethren, and say to them, 'I ascend to My Father and your Father, and My God and your God.'*" Why would Christ speak to her in this fashion if He were not going to ascend for another 40 days?).
 - 3. The fact that it is the logical time to relocate all OT saints to heaven and to make His victorious proclamation (see point III.A.).
- B. Forty days later, after a series of convincing post-resurrection appearances, He made His final ascent into heaven, whereupon the Father spoke the words of Ps.110:1 to Him.

III. What occurred in connection with Christ's first ascension?

- A. Jesus Christ, on resurrection Sunday, made a trip to Paradise where He made a victorious proclamation to the spirits imprisoned in Tartarus and to OT departed saints (1Pet.3:18-20; 4:6 "*For Christ also suffered for sins, the just for the unjust ones, in order that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in/by the Spirit [reference to resurrection]; in which also He went and made proclamation to the spirits now in prison, who were disobedient, when the patience of God kept waiting in the days of Noah...(Gen.6) For the gospel has for this purpose been preached even to those who are dead, that though they are judged in the flesh as men, they may now live in/by the spirit [their future resurrection]; ...according to the will of God*"; cp. 2Pet.2:4 "*For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell [ao.a.pt. of τάρταρόω, tartaroo] and committed them to pits of darkness, reserved for judgment...*").
- B. He then relocated all OT saints into the third heaven (Eph.4:8-10).
- C. He then, for the very first time in His glorified state, appeared before God the Father where, by divine decree, He was declared the Son and future King of the earth (Ps.2:7-9).
- D. He then returned to the earth, where He continued to make appearances to His disciples over a 40 day period (Act.1:2,3 "*until the day when He was taken up [second and final ascension], after He had by the Holy Spirit given orders to the apostles whom He had chosen. To these He also presented Himself alive, after His suffering, by many convincing proofs, appearing to them over a period of forty days, and speaking of the things concerning the kingdom of God*").

IV. What occurred in connection with His final ascension into heaven.

- A. Having gathered His disciples on the Mount of Olives, He gave them the Great Commission and ascended out of their sight (Act.1:4-12; Lk.24:50-53; cp. Mt.28:16-20) on Thursday, May 14, 33AD.
- B. Once in heaven, His Father invited Him to "*Sit at My right hand, until I make Your enemies a footstool for Your feet*" (Ps.110:1. One of the most quoted in the NT, this short psalm pictures Jesus as King, Priest, and victorious Warrior).

C. Ten days later, on the day of Pentecost (Sunday, May 24, 33AD), from His place "at the right hand", He sent God the Holy Spirit and formed His body, the Church, *"and gave gifts to men"* (Eph.4:8).

V. The fact and significance of Christ's ascension into heaven.

A. Jesus prophesied His ascension into heaven (Jn.6:62; 7:33; 14:12,28; 16:5,10,28).

B. Many NT passages demonstrate that Christ is in heaven (Act.2:33-36; 3:21; 7:55,56; 9:3-6; 22:6-8; 26:13-15; Rom.8:34; Eph.1:20-22; 4:8-10; Phil.2:6-11; 3:20; 1Thess.1:10; 4:16; 1Tim.3:16; Heb.1:3,13; 2:7; 4:14; 6:20; 7:26; 8:1; 9:24; 10:12,13; 12:2; 1Jn.2:1; Rev.1:7; 13-18; 5:5-12; 6:9-17; 14:1-5; 19:11-16).

C. Upon His ascension (and resurrection), His pre-incarnate glory, temporally laid aside in the incarnation (self-limitation/kenosis), has been fully restored (Jn.17:5 *"And now, glorify Me together with Yourself, Father, with the glory which I had (deity only) with You before the world was"*; 1Tim.6:15,16 *"...He who is the...King of kings and Lord of lords; who alone possesses immortality and dwells in unapproachable light; whom no man has seen or can see. To Him be honor and eternal dominion!"*; cp. Eph.1:20,21; Phil.2:9; Heb.2:8).

D. Christ is the first resurrection Man to enter heaven (1Cor.15:23 *"...Christ the first fruits"*; Col.1:18 *"...first-born from the dead"*).

E. Via resurrection and ascension, Christ shares the Father's throne (Ps.110:1 *"The LORD [sc. Father] says to my [David's] Lord [Christ]: 'Sit at My right hand, until I make Your enemies a footstool for Your feet'"*; cp. Mt.12:36; 16:19; Lk.20:42,43; 22:69; Rom.8:34; Eph.1:20; Col.3:1; Heb.1:3-13; 8:1; 10:12; 12:2; 1Pet.3:22).

F. The implication is that all power, authority, glory, and honor is shared with the Father by the God-Man (Theanthropic Person) on the heavenly throne.

G. At the right hand, Christ has authority over everything in the created order (Eph.1:22a; Col.2:10), including:

1. The nations, to bring positive volition to faith (Jn.17:2).

2. The Church, of which He is the Founder and Head (Eph.1:22b; 4:15; 5:23; Col.1:18; Act.20:28).

3. Authority over the angelic realm (1Pet.3:22; Heb.1:4-13).

H. From His pre-eminent position He will bring into subjection all forces that are antagonistic to God by a visible return to the earth in power and glory to establish an eternal kingdom (Ps.110:1; 1Cor.15:24-28; Heb.10:12,13).

I. At the Second Advent Christ will militarily crush all the opposing nations at Armageddon and establish His father David's throne, in accordance with the divine decree, and rule the planet from Mt. Zion (Ps.2:4-9; Isa.2:1-4; Micah.4:1-8; Ps.89:30-37).

VI. The present work of Christ at the right hand (session) includes:

A. The formation and growth of the Church (Act.2:47; 1Cor.6:15; 12:12-14; Eph.4:16; 5:30-32; Col.1:24; 2:19).

B. Bestowal of spiritual gifts upon the individual members (Eph.4:7,11; cp. 1Cor.12:27,28; Rom.12:3-8).

C. As the great High Priest of our Royal Priesthood, He intercedes for us (Rom.8:34; Heb.7:25; 9:24; 1Jn.2:1).

VII. Concluding observations.

A. Jesus Christ made two separate ascents into heaven. One at the beginning of the 40-day period, and one at the end.

B. The words of Ps.2:7-9 were spoken to Him on the first occasion, and the words of Ps.110:1 fit best His second and final ascent.

C. He remains in session over the course of the Church Age and Tribulation.

D. He makes one brief visit to the earth at the very end of the Church Age to fulfill Jn.14:3 (cp. 1Thess.1:10; 4:13-18).

- E. He will administer the judgments of the Tribulation from His place at the right hand.
- F. He will end the session at the end of the 7 year Tribulation to fulfill the words of Ps.110:1b ff (cf. Rev.12:5 "*And she [Israel] gave birth to a son, a male child, who is to rule the nations with a rod of iron; and her child was caught up to God and to His throne*").
- G. His position on the throne at the right hand of the Father, as the glorified God-Man, signifies His claim as the Head of all things, including a New Creation.
- H. As God, He keeps those who are His (Jn.10:27-30); as a man, He sympathizes with our weaknesses (Heb.4:15).
- I. His ascension is the ground for our motivation to stay the course of Ph2 (Heb.4:14).
- J. Through unflinching positive volition to BD we "*hold fast to the head*" of the Church (Col.2:19).
- K. During periods of testing and temptation we should "*draw near to the throne*" of His "*grace*" via prayer (Heb.4:16).
- L. For if we do, we will reign with Him (2Tim.2:11-13).

VIII. This doctrine was likely reflected in an early Christian hymn (1Tim.3:16):

"And by common confession great is the mystery of godliness:

He who was revealed in the flesh (refers to the incarnation),

Was vindicated in/by the Spirit (refers to the resurrection),

Beheld by angels,

Proclaimed among the nations,

Believed on in the world,

Taken up in glory (refers to His ascension)."

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