THE ASCENSION OF THE MESSIAH



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And when he had said these things, as they were looking, he was taken up; ...
Acts 1:9a



INTRODUCTION

The Ascension of the Messiah will be covered in two parts: first, the history of the Ascension and second, the theological implications, significances and the results of the Ascension.

I. THE HISTORY OF THE ASCENSION

The Ascension is covered in three passages of Scripture: Mark 16:19-20, Luke 24:50-53, and Acts 1:9-12. Six major areas concerning the history of the Ascension should be noted.

First, it occurred on the Bethany side of the Mount of Olives, according to Luke 24:50: *And he led them out until they were over against Bethany: ...*
The village of Bethany is on the lower eastern slopes of the Mount of Olives, and that is where the Ascension occurred. It did not occur from the peak of the Mount of Olives, where a church now stands to mark the spot.

Secondly, He lifted up His hands and blessed the disciples in a Jewish fashion, according to Luke 24:50: *... and he lifted up his hands, and blessed them.*

Thirdly, He was then carried into Heaven, according to Luke 24:51: *And it came to pass, while he blessed them* [He was giving them His final blessing], *he parted from them* [suddenly, He was separated from them], *and was carried up into heaven.*

He did not merely fly with His own power; He was carried up into heaven. This is reaffirmed by Acts 1:9a: *And when he had said these things,*

as they were looking, he was taken up; ...

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Fourthly, His Ascension was then veiled by a cloud according to Acts 1:9b: *... and a cloud received him out of their sight.*
The point is that when Yeshua (Jesus) ascended to a certain height in to the air, a cloud hid the rest of the Ascension. They did not actually see Him disappear into Heaven itself. They were only able to view the Ascension for so long before a cloud veiled it. But at what height it was veiled is not stated.

Fifth, there was an angelic message, in Acts 1:10-11: *And while they were looking stedfastly into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel; who also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye looking into heaven? this Jesus, who was received up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye beheld him going into heaven.*
The message of the angels was that someday Yeshua will also return in the clouds of Heaven. The emphasis is on the manner, not the place of the Second Coming. The angels did not say that He would return to the same place, but that the manner by which He returns will be the same as the manner by which He left. He left in the clouds of Heaven and He will return in the clouds of Heaven, but not in the same place. The place of the Second Coming will be the city of Bozrah, or Petra.

Sixth, He entered into Heaven and sat down at the right hand of God the Father, according to Mark 16:19: *So then the Lord Jesus, after he had spoken unto them, was received up into heaven, and sat down at the right hand of God.*

This fulfilled the Old Testament prophecy of Psalm 110:1, which prophesied that for a period of time the Messiah would be seated at the right hand of God the Father. It also fulfilled the prophecy of Jesus' own words that He would go to the Father (Jn. 14:2; 16:17, 28). This is reaffirmed later in I Timothy 3:16 and Hebrews 1:3.

II. THE THEOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS, SIGNIFICANCES, AND RESULTS OF THE ASCENSION

The second part of this study concerns the theological implications, significances, and results of the Ascension, and five specific aspects should be noted.

A. The Old Testament Prophecies of the Ascension

The first aspect is that the Ascension was foreviewed in the Old Testament in at least two different places: Psalm 68:18 and Proverbs 30:4. The answer to the question, " Who ascended and descended?" is none other than the Son of Man.

B. The Historical Fact of the Ascension

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The second aspect is the fact of the Ascension itself. The truth of the Ascension can be seen in two ways.

1. Predicted by the Messiah Himself

First, Yeshua Himself predicted that He would ascend into Heaven and return to God the Father (Jn. 3:13; 6:62; 14:2, 12; 16:5, 10, 17, 28).

2. Reaffirmed by the New Testament Writers

Second, is the event itself, which is described historically in three places (Mk. 16:19-20; Lk. 24:50-53; Acts 1:9-11) and once as a reaffirmation in the Epistles (Eph. 4:8-9). It is the Acts 1:9-11 passage in particular that gives the most detail.

3. The Key Greek Words Used

Four key Greek words or terms are used by Luke to give the details of the Ascension.

The first Greek term is *epeirthei*, which means, "to lift up," showing that the Ascension was upward. Furthermore, the term is in the passive state, showing that the Son was taken up into Heaven by God the Father.

The second Greek term is *hupelaben*, which has the concept of "being under something else." The Messiah was in the atmospheric heaven and was received by the clouds. The point is that the cloud was under Him; He was being supported in the Ascension by the cloud. Of course, the cloud also hid the Ascension from the view of the apostles.

The third Greek word is *poreuomeivou*, which literally means, "as he went." It means, "to pursue a journey." Jesus simply went on a trip. It was a departure in the sense of taking a journey, a departure from the earth and a journey to Heaven. The word conveys both concepts of departure and journey. The aspect of departure means that there was a departure from the earth; the aspect of journey means that it was a journey to Heaven.

The fourth Greek term is *analeimphtheis*. This means, "to be received up." It means that the Ascension ended when Yeshua was received up into Heaven. Every journey has its destination. While the third term emphasizes the concept of journey, the fourth term emphasizes the destination of this journey, which was Heaven itself. Like many journeys, this journey was not a permanent one, but a temporary one. Someday He will return to this earth to set up His Kingdom.

C. The Characteristics of the Ascension

The third aspect is that there are six characteristics of the Ascension. First, the Ascension was of the whole Person. It was not just the humanity of Jesus, nor was it only the deity of Yeshua that ascended. The whole God-Man, the Theanthropic Person, ascended.

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Secondly, it was visible: the disciples could see Jesus going up into the atmospheric heaven until a cloud hid Him from their view.

Thirdly, it was bodily. The resurrection body that He received upon His Resurrection is the body that ascended.

Fourthly, it was gradual. He was not instantaneously caught up with the speed of light, in a wink of an eye, and did not suddenly disappear. It was gradual and in four stages, as illustrated by the four Greek terms.

Fifth, the Ascension was received by clouds. Yeshua went up in the clouds of Heaven, the very clouds that hid the rest of the Ascension from the view of the apostles.

And, sixth, the Ascension meant a local transfer from one place to another place, from earth to Heaven.

D. The Conclusion of the Ascension

The fourth aspect is that the Ascension concluded with the arrival of Messiah into Heaven. That was the termination and the goal of the Ascension: the arrival of Jesus bodily into Heaven. This is so important that fifteen specific passages speak of His arrival into Heaven (Acts 3:20-21; 9:3-6; 22:6-10; 26:13-18; Phil. 3:20; I Thes. 1:10; 4:16; I Tim. 3:16; Heb. 4:14; 6:20; 7:26, 9:24; I Jn. 2:1; Rev. 1:17; 5:5-12).

E. The Significances of the Ascension

The fifth aspect is that there are twelve significances of the Ascension. The first significance of the Ascension proved the truth of what Yeshua said. He prophesied that He would go to the Father, and the Ascension fulfilled the claim that He made (Jn. 14:28).

The second significance of the Ascension means that Jesus is preparing a place. In John 14:2, He said that He is going to Heaven, to the Father, to prepare a place for us. The Ascension and the arrival of Yeshua into Heaven means that He is preparing a place for us.

The third significance of the Ascension is that it marks the culmination of His Exaltation (Eph. 1:20-23). Upon His arrival into Heaven, it completed the Exaltation, which began with His burial in a new, rich man's tomb.

The fourth significance of the Ascension is that it marks His headship over the Church. It means that He is head of the Church by virtue of His Ascension into Heaven (Col. 1:18).
The fifth significance of the Ascension is that it means there is a Man seated at the right hand of God the Father (Acts 2:32-35).

The sixth significance of the Ascension is that it began the high priestly ministry of Yeshua. Upon His Ascension, He took on His function as a priest, ever making intercession for us. By means of His Ascension, He can function in His priestly office in Heaven. Because there is a Man seated at the right hand of God the Father who is performing a high priestly ministry, the writer of the Book of Hebrews encourages believers to make use of this High Priest. As our High Priest, He represents us. Since He is a Man who was tempted in all points like we are but without sin, it means that He is a sympathetic high priest.

The seventh significance of the Ascension is that it marks the coming of the Holy Spirit. The new type of ministry, which the Holy Spirit began in Acts 2, could not have occurred prior to the Ascension of Jesus. Only after His Ascension could the Holy Spirit come, indwell believers forever, and begin His work of Spirit-baptism. This is brought out prophetically in John 7:39 and 16:7, and in fulfillment in Acts 2:33.

The eighth significance of the Ascension is that it makes the Messiah a forerunner into Heaven (Heb. 6:20). By means of His Ascension into Heaven, He became a forerunner into Heaven. A forerunner means "the first of more to come later." The believers are the more to come later.

The ninth significance of the Ascension is that it marks the believers' new position as being seated in the heavenlies (Eph. 1:20-21). Because believers are in Christ, they are in a new position. Because the Messiah is seated in the heavenlies at the right hand of God the Father, and because believers are in the Messiah, God views believers as being seated in the heavenlies, not yet physically, but positionally.

The tenth significance of the Ascension is that by means of the Ascension, the gifts of the Holy Spirit could be given (Eph. 4:7-11). This passage points out that the gifts of the Holy Spirit were only available after the Messiah ascended into Heaven. So the Son ascended into Heaven and then gave the spiritual gifts to men.

The eleventh significance of the Ascension is that it provides the manner, not the place, of His return (Acts 1:9-11). He ascended in the clouds of Heaven, and He will come in like manner someday, in the clouds of Heaven.

The twelfth significance of the Ascension is that it means that the Old Testament saints are now also in Heaven. Before His Ascension, the Old Testament saints' souls were still kept in the center of the earth in Sheol or Hades. When Yeshua ascended, He took the souls of the Old Testament saints with Him, and the Ascension means that the souls of the Old Testament saints are now in Heaven (Eph. 4:8).✡

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