

"Watchman, what of the night?"



"The hour has come, the hour is striking, and striking at you, the hour and the end!" Ezekiel 7:6 (Moffatt)

**"THE ASCENSION OF CHRIST
INTO HEAVEN: ANOTHER
LOOK INTO VARIOUS
ASPECTS OF THIS ESSENTIAL
BIBLICAL TRUTH"**

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Editor's Preface

This Issue of WWN brings our ongoing coverage of the ascension of Christ into heaven to a conclusion. For the past year, a consecutive series of main articles examined the various aspects of this biblical doctrine and the relevance it has to the present truth of our time. Beginning with Issue # 40, we chronicled the successive events that the resurrected Jesus experienced as He passed through the heavenly realm, into the city of God, and was enthroned as King and High Priest in the heavenly sanctuary / temple. And though, as the articles progressed forward, the studies were by no means exhaustive, they showed how scripturally sound, vital and necessary the ascent of Jesus into heaven was and is to the entire plan of salvation - particularly as revealed in the High Priestly intercessory/pre-advent judgmental mediation of Christ in heaven. The ascension of Christ is the defining event that marks the conclusion of Christ's perfect, complete and finished earthly salvific work, and the beginning of His heavenly salvific work. A rightful biblical recognition and understanding of this crucial doctrine is imperative, especially as the return of Christ from heaven and the "times of the restitution of all things" (Acts 3: 21) draws ever nearer.

And yet within Christendom, the overall predominate view of our Lord's ascension into the heavenly realm is to almost universally treat it as a



fringe, non-essential, borderline, or peripheral teaching. Considering how theologically untenable this totally unbiblical position is, it was our conviction (as always) to present these expositions on this topic with the hope and prayer that the Spirit of God will instill a desire within the reader/subscriber of the thought paper to a deeper search of the Scriptures for themselves.

THE ASCENSION OF CHRIST INTO HEAVEN: ANOTHER LOOK INTO VARIOUS ASPECTS OF THIS ESSENTIAL BIBLICAL TRUTH - 6 -

Concluding Overview/Closing Observations -

The Lord Jesus Christ for three and a half years had openly proclaimed, taught, and exemplified among the people (primarily the "house of Israel"), by word and deed, the principles of the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 5: 1-12; Luke 6: 20-26; etc.). Yet, often, the multitudes that had "gathered together unto him" failed to comprehend the deeper spiritual meaning of His message:

"And [Jesus] began again to teach by the sea side: and there was gathered unto him a great multitude, so that he entered into a ship, and sat in the sea; and the whole multitude was by the sea on the land. And he taught them many things by parables ...

"And he said unto them, He that hath ears to hear, let him hear. And when he was alone, they that were about him with the twelve asked of him the parable. And he said unto them, Unto you it is given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God: but unto them that are without, all these things are done in parables: That seeing they may see, and not perceive; and hearing they may hear, and not understand; lest at any time they

should be converted, and their sins should be forgiven them." (Mark 4: 1-2a, 9-12; compare with Matthew 13: 1-3a, 10-17; and Isaiah 6: 9-10).

Like iniquitous and wicked Judah centuries before, who had defiled and blinded themselves with pagan idolatry (see Isaiah 57: 1-21), the people in Christ's day were also covetous, vain, proud, and selfish as well. The commandments and traditions of men (Mark 7: 1-23, compare with Matthew 15: 1-20) promoted false concepts and doctrines which colored, confused, and to a substantial extent even corrupted their minds regarding spiritual truth. The diluting effect of mingling truth with error has a tendency of exalting, permeating, and substituting the falsehood (however small) in place of the truth - as the proverbial saying "A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump" found in Scripture testifies to (1 Corinthians 5: 6; Galatians 5: 9; etc.). The resultant deception makes the error appear as truth thereby creating an aversion to unadulterated truth that manifests itself in varied expressions of prejudice, bigotry, and self-biased justification toward it. The pernicious effect that this can cause was illustrated by Jesus in a discussion that He had entered into while attending a feast at Levi-Matthew's house earlier regarding the ritualistic practices of the Pharisees:

"And no man putteth new wine into old bottles; else the new wine will burst the bottles, and be spilled, and the bottles shall perish. But new wine must be put into new bottles; and both are preserved. No man also having drunk old wine straightway desireth new: for he saith, The old is better." (Luke 5: 37-39).

Christ was attempting to show the assembled guests at the feast that the efforts to unite His teachings with those of the reli-

gious leaders of that day would be in vain. By piling upon the teachings of the Word of God, the commandments and traditions of men, the condition of these leaders had become so fixed and intolerant of any understanding of spiritual truth that did not conform to their ideas that it was like trying to put new wine into old bottles that, after awhile, became dry and brittle. As the dried-up wine bottles (skins) would contract, burst, and spill out the contents thereby ruining the bottle and wasting the contents, so the unvarnished truth of God's word would "burst" the old and decaying "bottles" of the ceremonious traditions of the religious leadership. And though the teachings of the Savior was in complete harmony with the revealed will of God as plainly set forth in the Scriptures, to the people it seemed like new doctrine. Until the old customs, rites, and traditions were emptied out of the "old bottles," the "new wine" of Christ's teachings would find little place in the minds and hearts of the people. They would still want the "old wine."

It was because of this that the One who was the very embodiment of "the truth" (John 14: 6) spoke and taught "unto the multitude in parables; *and without a parable spake he not unto them.*" (Matthew 13: 34, emphasis added).

Due to their personal appointment by Jesus, their close association with Him, and the training they were receiving, the twelve apostles had been plainly instructed regarding the true nature of Christ's earthly mission and message (Matthew 16: 13-28). He had revealed that at Jerusalem, He would "suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day." (Ibid., verse 21). All this would happen *prior* to His ascent to

the Father in heaven and accordingly *precede* His return in glory from heaven (Ibid., verse 27). However, all this was but dimly comprehended by the disciples as the traditions and doctrines of men were exerting a strong influence on them. The religious leaders in particular, under the hypocritical guise of spiritual piety, had used a multiplicity of outward rites and ceremonies to bolster their prestige, power, and monetary gain while at the same time burdening and oppressing the common populace. (Matthew 23: 1-33; compare with Mark 12: 38-40; and Luke 11: 37-48, 20: 45-47). Concerning this, the servant of the Lord has insightfully commented:

"As they departed from God, the Jews in a great degree lost sight of the teaching of the ritual service. That service had been instituted by Christ Himself. In every part it was a symbol of Him; and it had been full of vitality and spiritual beauty. But the Jews lost the spiritual life from their ceremonies, and clung to the dead forms. They trusted to the sacrifices and ordinances themselves, instead of resting upon Him to whom they pointed. In order to supply the place of that which they had lost, *the priests and rabbis multiplied requirements of their own; and the more rigid they grew, the less of the love of God was manifested. They measured their holiness by the multitude of their ceremonies, while their hearts were filled with pride and hypocrisy.*" (DA, pg. 29, emph. added).¹

The grasp for self exaltation and aggrandizement gripped all of society, focusing attention on who is the greatest? This question even occupied the thoughts and attention of Christ's followers, fostering suspicion, strife, jealousy, and bitterness among them as they postured for recognition and position (see Matthew 18: 1-3; Mark 9: 33-37, 10: 35-45; compare with Luke 9: 46-48; Matthew 20: 20

-28). Consequently, the question of who should be the greatest surfaced again at the supper table toward the beginning of the last evening that Jesus spent with "the twelve apostles" to partake of the Passover / Communion meal:

"And there was also a strife among them, which of them should be accounted the greatest." (Luke 22: 24).

Again, the Lord's servant remarks:

"This contention, carried on in the presence of Christ, grieved and wounded Him. *The disciples clung to their favorite idea that Christ would assert His power, and take His position on the throne of David.* And in heart each still longed for *the highest place in the kingdom.* They had placed their own estimate upon themselves and upon one another, and, instead of regarding their brethren as more worthy, they had placed themselves first." (DA, pgs. 643-644, emph. added).¹

A little while onward during the Last Supper, after Judas Iscariot had left the table, Jesus said to the remaining eleven disciples:

"Little children, yet a little while I am with you. Ye shall seek me: and as I said unto the Jews, Whither I go, ye cannot come; so now I say to you. (John 13: 33).

Earlier in His public ministry, Christ had occasionally announced "unto the Jews" the same message (compare with Ibid. 7: 34-36, 8:21). In essence, He had proclaimed that as God (the Father) was the One who had sent Him from heaven to the earth, ere long He would "go unto him that sent me" (Ibid. 7: 33) - i.e., back from the earth to the Father in heaven. And "now" Jesus was directing that message specifically to the disciples assembled that night in the upper room. A similar dismay expressed by the Jews previously was also manifested among the eleven at this time and voiced by Simon Peter:

"Lord, whither goest thou? Jesus answered him, Whither I go, thou canst not follow me now ... " (Ibid. 13: 36).

The Writings make this perceptive observation:

"The disciples could not rejoice when they heard this. Fear fell upon them. They pressed close about the Saviour. Their Master and Lord, their beloved Teacher and Friend, He was dearer to them than life. To Him they had looked for help in all their difficulties, for comfort in their sorrows and disappointments. Now He was to leave them, a lonely, dependent company. Dark were the forebodings that filled their hearts." (DA, pg. 662).¹

In response, Christ directed their thoughts and attention away from their *earthly* pilgrimage and upward to their *heavenly* heritage:

"Let not your heart be troubled: ye 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 unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also. And whither I go ye know, and the way ye know." (John 14: 1-4).

Sadly, the "dark ... forebodings that filled their hearts" clouded their understanding of these events with apprehension, doubt, and perplexity:

"Thomas saith unto him, Lord, we know not whither thou goest; and how can we know the way? ...

"Philip saith unto him, Lord, shew us the Father, and it sufficeth us." (Ibid., verses 5, 8).

Jesus proceeded by explaining to the eleven more detail regarding Himself, His own mission, the work and mission of His disciples (Ibid., verses 6-7, 9-15), and then the

heavenly gift of the Holy Spirit that would come to them because of His upcoming return (ascension) to His Father in heaven:

"And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter ... Even the Spirit of truth ... for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you ...

"But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you ... Ye have heard how I said unto you, I go away, and come again unto you. If ye loved me, ye would rejoice, because I said, I go unto the Father: for my Father is greater than I. And now I have told you before it come to pass, that, when it is come to pass, ye might believe. (Ibid., verses 16-17, 26, 28-29).

On this, the Writings note:

"Jesus had opened before His disciples a vast tract of truth. But it was most difficult for them to keep His lessons distinct from the traditions and maxims of the scribes and Pharisees. They had been educated to accept the teaching of the rabbis as the voice of God, and it still held a power over their minds, and molded their sentiments. Earthly ideas, temporal things, still had a large place in their thoughts. *They did not understand the spiritual nature of Christ's kingdom*, though He had so often explained it to them. Their minds had become confused. They did not comprehend the value of the scriptures Christ presented. Many of His lessons seemed almost lost upon them. Jesus saw that they did not lay hold of the real meaning of His words. He compassionately promised that the Holy Spirit should recall these sayings to their minds. And He had left unsaid many things that could not be comprehended by the disciples. These also would be

opened to them by the Spirit. The Spirit was to quicken their understanding, that they might have an appreciation of heavenly things." (DA, pgs. 670-671, emph. added).¹

How tragic that the comprehension and understanding of the Savior's own apostles, who had been plainly taught and nurtured by Him for the gospel ministry, was little better than the multitudes "without" to whom Christ had spoken only in parables. And as we have seen, the Scriptures show that this was chiefly the detrimental effect of traditions and commandments of men, endless and burdensome rites and ceremonies, sanctimonious exaltation of self, a love and relish for the worldly, the carnal, and the transient, and a corresponding disregard, confusion, and ignorance of spiritual / heavenly things. And though the people of Israel were expectantly looking for the coming of the promised Messiah foretold in the Hebrew Scriptures (the Old Testament), their interpretation and conception of the Messiah, because of their acceptance of these extraneous perversions, was wrested, distorted, and erroneous. Accordingly, the entire 'world-view' of the Hebrew people at the first coming of Christ is aptly set forth by the servant of the Lord as follows:

"The Jewish nation had corrupted their religion by useless ceremonies and customs. This laid a heavy tax upon the people, especially the poorer classes. They were also under bondage to the Romans, and required to pay tribute to them. The Jews were unreconciled to their bondage, and looked forward to the triumph of their nation through the Messiah, the powerful deliverer foretold in prophecy. Their views were narrow. *They thought the Coming One would, at his appearing, assume kingly honors, and, by force of arms, subdue their oppressors, and take*

the throne of David. Had they, with humble minds and spiritual discernment, studied the prophecies, they would not have been found in so great error as to overlook the prophecies which pointed to his first advent in humility, and misapply those which spoke of his second coming with power and great glory. The Jewish people had been striving for power. They were ambitious for worldly honors. They were proud and corrupt, and could not discern sacred things. *They could not distinguish between those prophecies which pointed to the first advent of Christ, and those that described his second, glorious appearing. The power and glory described by the prophets as attending his second advent, they looked for at his first advent.* Their national glory was to them their greatest anxiety. Their ambitious desire was the establishment of a temporal kingdom, which they supposed would reduce the Romans to subjection, and exalt themselves with authority and power to reign over them. They had made the proud boast to those to whom they were in subjection, that they were not to oppress them long; for their reign would soon commence, which would be more exalted and glorious than even that of Solomon." (2SP, pgs. 14-15, emph. added).²

This concise assessment of the "Jewish nation" in Christ's day accurately describes the setting and context of all the things written in the Bible about Jesus, especially as found in the four Gospel books. The aspect that we want to particularly focus attention on is National Israel's failure to "distinguish between those prophecies" concerning the Savior's first advent and those that concerned His second advent. The scriptural record clearly reveals that this "great error" among the Jews is what predominately led to all the outward and inward perversions that "had

corrupted their religion." The prophecies pointing to the Messiah's first coming as a suffering "righteous servant" (Isaiah 50: 4-6, 53: 1-12; Psalm 22: 1-21; etc.) were, at the first advent of Jesus, either overlooked or ignored. Similarly, at the Savior's first advent, the misapplication of the prophecies pointing to the Messiah's second coming as a mighty, conquering king (Joel 3: 1-17; Isaiah 66: 15-16; Zephaniah 3: 8-20; etc.) was the overwhelming expectation of the Jewish populace at that time. Because the nation had utterly failed to learn the lesson that before the crown, comes the cross, that humility precedes the glory (which Christ first came to exemplify and fulfill in proper order and accordance with the prophecies foretelling His first appearance), when Jesus "came unto his own ... his own received him not." (John 1: 11). This rejection of Christ through the misapplication of His second coming in glory with His first coming in humility also served to greatly misrepresent and distort the true meaning of the Messiah's second coming in glory. Through false customs, traditions, and doctrines, the Jews of the first century had twisted Christ's reign in glory into a vehicle to serve their own selfish and worldly power seeking ambitions. The meek and lowly Jesus of Nazareth of that day was most definitely not the 'Messiah' they (wrongly) anticipated - let alone wanted!

Again, this "great error" has farther reaching consequences than most realize. Concerning National Israel, this error had a major influence on the entire society, even adversely affecting the twelve apostles as previously outlined. But even more crucial, as it was the central, overarching causation that led the corporate majority of the nation to reject the Lord Jesus as the Messiah in 31 A.D., so *twenty-one centuries later*, the Rab-

binic Judaism of our time still rejects Jesus as the Messiah on the same grounds. Regrettably, by laying aside those scriptural passages that speak of One coming in humility as non-Messianic, and singling out those prophecies that speak of Messiah's coming in glory, Judaism in our day asserts that they are still awaiting the arrival of the 'true' promised Messiah because Jesus did not fulfill the Messianic 'glory' predictions outlined in the Tanakh (Old Testament) at His appearance in the first century.

Surprisingly this "great error" is also embraced, at least in principle, by practically all of professed Christianity today. In our time, the heavenly work of Christ, presented in the 'glory' prophecies describing the second advent of Jesus, are increasingly being misapplied into being fulfilled "spiritually" at His first advent. The various ways that the same Messianic 'glory' prophecies have now been misinterpreted and applied to the 'humility' prophecies have all resulted in the same basic thing. Today, practically all Christians center their entire salvific theology solely in the earthly work of Jesus. And as the "present truth" (2 Peter 1: 12b) at Christ's

first coming was in recognizing and believing all that He, the Messiah, fulfilled in the 'humility' prophecies through His earthly work at that time, so the "present truth" today is centered in recognizing and believing all that Jesus, the Messiah, is now and will fulfill in the 'glory' prophecies through His heavenly work culminating in His second coming.

Briefly, but pointedly, to "overlook" the biblical view of the 'glory' prophecies in order to, in some manner, misapply the 'humility' prophecies will leave us, when the Savior does "appear the second time without sin unto salvation" (Hebrews 9: 28b), as unprepared to meet Him as the Jewish Nation was when Christ came the first time. The consequences now, as then, will be at least equally as dire, and even more tragic! GLP

1. Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1940), 29, 643-644, 662, 670-671.
2. White, *The Spirit of Prophecy, Volume Two* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1969), 14-15.

*All Scripture quotations are from the King James Version unless otherwise indicated.

"Watchman, what of the night?" is published by the Adventist Laymen's Foundation of Iowa, Inc., P.O. Box 665, Nora Springs, IA 50458-0665, USA.

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