

INTRODUCTION:

In a South Wales town, 2 retired Baptist missionaries came upon a local 6th former, one school day. He was a keen Christian who, unusually, was not in school. He politely told them that he was on his way to the local Anglican Church to celebrate Ascension Day, as it was not really marked in Non Conformist circles. He was correct. But is it important?

QUESTION: What is the Ascension of Jesus ?

Does it matter? If so, why?

THE ASCENSION IN SCRIPTURE:

Luke: Luke 24:49-53: Acts 1:8-11; 7:56. (The first two quotations describe the actual Ascension. The third, one of its results.)

Matthew and Mark (and Luke !): the Son of Man in "glory" sayings fit with the Ascension. (Mk 14:62 et al).

Paul: Romans 8:32f.; Eph 2:6 etc. etc.

Peter: 1 Peter 3:21 etc.

John : John 20:17 for the anticipated ascension and Revelation 1-22: Jesus is enthroned, risen and ascended.

In the NT there are many allusions to Psalm 110, as well as direct quotations from it. So the Ascension of Jesus features widely in the NT. (as above shows). There is a NT letter that strongly emphasises the Ascension of Jesus:

Hebrews: Jesus' ministry (with particular reference to Psalm 110) is described in detail.

Beale: ' Hebrews virtually begins with the Ascension of Jesus (1:3)...Christ's kingship and priesthood are of a piece and are as a result of the Ascension."

The author works on Psalm 110 especially, throughout. He also draws on Gen. 14:18-20 and concludes that Melchizedek "resembles the Son of God...King of righteousness, King of peace." (Heb. 7:1-4). See 8:1 for a strong statement mid-argument: " Now the point in what we are saying is this: we have such a high priest, one who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven.....".

Luke 24:27, 44ff. Burning hearts, opened Scriptures, enlightened minds as Jesus took the Old Testament Scriptures (i.e. The law, the prophets and the writings) and opened up in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself. There were 40 days between the resurrection and the Ascension and the Apostles would have imbibed Jesus teaching deeply in that period.

Do we see the Ascension of the Messiah in the OT? We will concentrate on 3 Psalms, to see if that is so.

1: PSALM 110:

Quoted by Jesus in the Temple (Luke 22:41-44:) as a question hanging in the air for the Jewish leaders. David composed it and the NT writers utilise it. So David, in this Psalm is expressing prophetically, the ultimate coming of a Davidic Messiah, not as an Aaronic priest but One "a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek." (See Hebrews 1:13; 5:5,6,10; 6:20-8:7)

Davidic kingship is ensured in the NT, with Jesus revealed as a Priest and King . His victory is assured (Psalm 110:v.2,5-6).

V.1: "The LORD has said..."

V.4:"The LORD has sworn..."

These two great promises are worked into the thought of the letter to the Hebrews.

QUESTION: If Jesus is our High Priest is He approachable and Does He understand your struggles? (See Heb.2:17-18 and 4:14-16 etc.)

2: PSALM 68:18f.

Quoted by Paul in Eph.4:8f. with reference to the ascension and the gifts of men (and women) ministers to the church. The Psalm celebrates the victory of Yahweh over Israel's enemies (see V.1) and depicts his dwelling in David's tabernacle. Again it points forward to the ultimate Davidic King, victorious over His and the church's enemies. The ministries of apostles, prophets, evangelists and pastor-teachers are to build up disciples as mature ministers. These disciples are to be equipped by the aforesaid gifts, as the members of the Body of Christ, to pass on the knowledge of the Good News in season and out of season. (See Ps.68:11:"The Lord gives the word;the women who announce the news are a great host." Was this countercultural?)

68:17: "Sinai is now in the sanctuary." I.e. The ark of the covenant is in Zion in David's tabernacle with the tablets of stone written with the Ten Commandments.

68:18: "You have ascended on high,
leading a host of captives in your train,
And receiving gifts from among men,
Even among the rebellious that the Lord God may dwell there."

One of Paul's applications, among others, is identifying this Psalm to the Ascension of Jesus. God dwells among the rebellious (Gentiles). He will dwell wherever He wants and He can turn wilful rebellion into glad obedience.

QUESTION: Why does Paul change "receiving" to "giving" in Psalm 68:18 and Eph 4:8-11?

3: PSALM 24

This third Psalm of David is another Psalm of victory. It may have originally been about the presence of God in the ark of the covenant, with a possible ceremony expressed in verses 7-10 which sees the King (Yahweh) entering the gates of the city, Jerusalem.

In the blazing light of the NT, the 'fit' of vv.7-10 very comfortably measures up to Jesus in the NT. But He has ascended to the Jerusalem above (Gal 3:), to the heavenly Zion (Hebrews 12:22 FF.), whose gates have opened at His arrival. There He rules as the Priest King in God's Temple, the Firstfruits of the resurrection, the "new and living way", ""The Lord of hosts, He is the King of Glory". Jesus, the Son of God and Son of David, the only Saviour.

QUESTION: Jesus is the “The King of glory”/”The Lord of Hosts”. Have we seen and do we savour God’s glory in Christ?

CONCLUSION:

1: The Ascension is the completion of the Resurrection of Jesus. Once crucified, He is now glorified. With the Ascension all is ratified.

2: “The abiding intercession of Jesus” in heaven is in tandem with the Holy Spirit (Rom 8:26-27), who intercedes for us on earth.

That means that the Spirit is guiding Christ’s church. And we have divine care, 24/7.

3:”There is a man in the glory”, rejoiced the Puritans. The Last Adam has done what the First Adam did not-plus He brought about our redemption. Flesh has been lifted to the throne of God-He. 7:26-28. “It was fitting that we should have such a High Priest, holy innocent, unstained separated from sinners, exalted above the heavens.....”.

Jesus prayer in John 17:5 has been answered. His heavenly glory is restored. Now He who did not hold on to or seize Godhood (Phil 2:5-11) but came in the appearance of men, as a Servant, has completed the cycle of movement in the Ascension. He has gone from heaven to earth and from earth to heaven. And He will return and gather His own to bring us home. For He has taken Man to the throne of God ! He forever remains the God-Man.

4: The Holy Spirit will be poured out on God’s people 10 days after the Ascension.