

CHRIST LIFTED UP TO HEAVEN – RECEIVED IN GLORY

Acts focuses on Christ's manifold glories in heaven and on their impact in people's lives, whether believers or unbelievers. Christ's glories and their effects have been recorded to instruct us about what happened in those days, but also that – all through the Church age – there might be results for Him, according to the Epistles' teachings. In this chapter, we will consider some of Christ's glories as recorded in Acts 1, linked with His ascension. Next, we look at some remarkable statements in John's writings about this important topic, after which the chapter closes with a few comments on Judas.

The Starting Point – Christ is Lord, Having all Authority

Right at the beginning of Acts, it is quite fitting that Luke brings out some of the details concerning Christ's greatness as related to His *going up*. In Luke's Gospel, we find Christ's *coming into* this world and then His *going out* of it. This is followed in Acts with Christ's *going up* as well as His being *taken up* and *received* into heaven.¹ Matthew does not mention Christ's ascension because he emphasizes that the Lord Jesus, as the risen One and the true King, has all authority in heaven and on earth; He *remains* (through His Spirit) with His own, until the completion of the age (Mt. 28:20). Mark portrays Him as the Servant, who, as the risen Lord, has the authority to give instructions to His disciples for service (Mk. 16:19). Mark, also called John Mark, shows the humble Servant with God-given rights, as a Man in a position of authority, who is also the Son of God, Yahweh Himself (Mk. 1:1). Mark describes three phases in the Lord's use of His authority.

1. During His ministry in the days of His *humiliation* ("the *Lord* has need of it," Mk. 11:3).
2. Christ's authority was reconfirmed through His *resurrection* (Rom. 1:4). In this new position, He gave instructions to His disciples (Mk. 16:19; Mt. 28:18-20; Lk. 24:36-51; Jn. 20:17-23).
3. The perfect Servant continued to work with His disciples, but now it was from the glory *as exalted*. One way in which He exercised His authority was in authenticating the disciples' testimony by the signs He gave through them (Mk. 16:20).

What do *we* learn from these points? As believers, we are also under Christ's authority²:

1. We learn from His example during the days of His flesh and we submit ourselves to Him, as we keep following our Master and perfect Model (Phil. 2). We have a solemn responsibility, for if He is not Lord *of all* (in our practice) He is not Lord *at all* (in our testimony).

¹ The *Mount of Olives*, from where Christ ascended, has its name because of the large number of olive trees which grew there. It is a ridge running north to south about 1.8 mi (3 km) long, east of Jerusalem across the Kidron Valley. Its central elevation is about 100 ft (30 m) higher than Jerusalem.

² The word *authority* (or *power*; Gr. *exousía*) occurs 7 times in Acts (1:7; 5:4; 8:19; 9:14; 26:10, 12, 18).

2. Through His resurrection, we are linked with Him – as a new generation, a new family – and so we obey Him, holding fast the Head, drawing our resources from Him (Phil. 3; Col. 2).
3. We stand at awe before His present glory (Heb. 2:9) and, as associated with Him who is now in heaven, we represent Him here on earth in the scene of His rejection (10:19-25; 13:13-15).

Christ was Taken up or Lifted up to Heaven by God

In connection with Christ’s ascension, let us first notice the marvellous balance of Scripture. The same verse that confirms His humility as Servant by the fact that He was “taken up” (Mk. 16:19) also demonstrates His greatness as He “sat down at the right hand of God.” The verb translated *taken up* is used in the same way four more times in the New Testament to indicate how the Lord Jesus was “taken up” or “received up.” It is in the passive form, underlining what God did to the Man Christ Jesus, and it is in the aorist tense, which indicates something with lasting results:

1. “Until the day in which He was *taken up*, after He through the Holy Spirit had given commandments to the apostles whom He had chosen” (Acts 1:2).
2. “Who also said, “Men of Galilee, why do y o u stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was *taken up* from y o u into heaven, will so come in like manner as y o u saw Him go into heaven” (Acts 1:11).
3. “Beginning from the baptism of John to that day when He was *taken up* from us, one of these must become a witness with us of His resurrection” (Acts 1:22).
4. “And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifested in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen by angels, preached among the Gentiles, believed on in the world, *received up* in glory” (1 Tim. 3:16).

The same verb (Gr. *analambánō*) is used once more in the same tense, this time with respect to the vessel that came down to Peter and was taken up into heaven again (Acts 10:16) – an illustration of the Church in its heavenly origin and destiny. This account shows that the Church is associated in nature with Christ glorified, as in the expression “Jerusalem above” (Gal. 4:26), and linked with “Him who comes from above” and “is above all” (Jn. 3:31 JND).

Christ at the Right Hand of God

The new position which Christ has received as a Man was already predicted in Psalm 110. The New Testament quotes this passage more than any other psalm. For instance, verse 1 is partly quoted five times (Mt. 22:44; Mk. 12:36; Lk. 20:42; Acts 2:34; Heb. 1:13). Christ’s new position *at* God’s right hand³ highlights God’s *favour* and *blessing* towards the faithful One who had glorified Him. It also shows the *authority* Christ has received in that exalted

³ Compare Acts 2:25, quoting Psalm 16. The concept of *the right hand* is often used or illustrated in the Old Testament, for example in Genesis 48:13-14, when Jacob blessed Joseph’s sons. The name *Benjamin*, “son of my right hand,” indicates the thought of being “special” (Gen. 35:18). The Lord Jesus is now *the Son of God’s right hand*, after His sufferings as *Ben-Oni*, “son of my sorrow.” Notice the *prophetic* order, *suffering* followed by *blessing*. After Israel’s sufferings, the nation will recognize Christ as their Messiah (Isa. 53; cf. Jn. 20:31), as being the Son of God’s right hand (Ps. 80:17; Zech. 12:10; Mt. 23:37-39). We see the *blessing* emphasized in 1 Kings 2:19; Psalms 16:11; 45:9.

position, just as He had God-given authority as a Man on earth (Mk. 11:3) and afterwards in a new way in resurrection (Mt. 28:18; Acts 1:2). Thus, everything is made subject to Him who has this new position (1 Pet. 3:22), even though this is not yet publicly acknowledged in this world (Heb. 2:8b). At the same time, it was *by* God's right hand that Christ received this exalted place (Acts 2:33; 5:31). The Lord's position in heaven as a glorified Man is characteristic for the age of grace (Acts 7:55-56). The Greek term *en dexiai* (Eng. *at the right hand*) occurs 8 times in the NT, emphasizing a new order and position (other combinations and forms of this word occur 46 more times). This position is linked with different verbs or verb forms, which will be emphasized, as a brief comment will be added for each reference.

1. "... Who *is* even at the right hand of God" (Rom. 8:34). This is Christ's present position ("He is...") and in it He is taking care of His body on earth, making constant intercession.
2. "... *Seated* (lit. *made to sit*) Him at His right hand in the heavenlies" (Eph. 1:20). God demonstrated His magnificent power⁴: first, in raising Christ from among the dead and then, in giving Him this exalted place of honour and dominion.
3. "Seek the things that are above, where Christ is, *seated*⁵ at the right hand of God" (Col. 3:1 ESV). The Object of God's delight when on earth, Christ is so now in heaven (Col. 1:19; 2:9) and is, or should be, ours as well. The Greek verb form indicates that Christ is *sitting* at God's right hand in heaven, just as He once was *sitting* on a donkey in the days of His humiliation on earth (Jn. 12:15). In both cases, the verb has the same Greek tense (participle present middle voice), emphasizing a personal and ongoing experience.
4. "... *Sat down* at the right hand of the Majesty on high" (Heb. 1:3). He sat Himself there! God did not make Him sit down, although in other contexts He did. This verse emphasizes *Christ's personal greatness* in the fact that He *ascended* and *sat down* Himself.
5. "We have such a High Priest, who *has taken His seat* at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens" (Heb. 8:1). As such He was greeted by God (Heb. 5:10) because of the greatness of *His office*. Having such an eminent office, He was competent and qualified *to sit down*. And so He took His seat at God's right hand, while God glorified Him in this (Acts 3:13; cf. Jn. 13:32b). Taking this high place, He did not seek to glorify Himself (Heb. 5:5). Sadly, the professing church has been trying to glorify herself (Rev. 18:7).
6. "But this Man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins, forever *sat down* at the right hand of God" (Heb. 10:12). Because of the greatness of His once-for-all accomplished *work and sacrifice*, according to God's thoughts, He was qualified to sit down at God's right hand.
7. "Looking unto Jesus, the Author and Finisher of the faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and *has sat down* at the right hand of

⁴ God's power and "right hand" are mentioned in connection with *creation* (Isa. 48:13) as well as *redemption* (Ex. 14:21-31; 15:1-12; Dt. 33:2; Ps. 18:35; 20:6; 44:3; 78:54; 80:15, etc.). God's *right hand* is associated with power, guidance, provision, preservation, protection (Ps. 139:10) and His future rule or dominion (Ps. 48:10). The term *right hand* (Gr. *dexiós* and used in various forms in the Gr. text of Acts), occurs 7 times in Acts (2:25, 33, 34; 3:7; 5:31; 7:55-56) of which 5 refer to God.

⁵ This verb *to sit* or *to be seated* (Gr. *kathēmai*) occurs 7 times in Acts, in various forms, including a compound with the prefix *sun* (2:2, 34; 3:10; 8:28; 14:8; 23:3; 26:30); the last reference has the compound.

the throne of God” (Heb. 12:2). This verse describes Christ’s present position at God’s right hand as a result of *His faithfulness on earth*. The verb form emphasizes that His position is permanent.

8. “... Who has gone into heaven and *is* at the right hand of God, angels and authorities and powers having been made subject to Him” (1 Pet. 3:22). The Lord’s entrance into heaven and His place at God’s right hand gave Him *as Man* a position which is higher than all the angelic authorities, even though in creation-order man is lower than the angels. How great He is!

In the near future, Christ will be seen as coming down from God’s right hand, but then it will be in judgment (Mt. 26:64; Mk. 14:62; Lk. 22:69). Revelation records Christ’s right hand *eight* times in His *pronouncing* and *executing* judgment (1:16-17, 20; 2:1; 5:1, 7; 10:2, 5).

Christ “was lifted up” – Yet He also “went up”

“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). In its active tense this verb is often translated “to lift up,” while here it is used in the passive, in the sense of “to cause to move upward” and so we could also translate, “*He was lifted up*.” This is the honour God bestowed upon the Lord Jesus! As the religious, political and cultural world had *cast Him out*, God *lifted Him up*. This demonstration of honour is made evident by the cloud in which Christ was *received*. In the Old Testament, this cloud signified the public manifestation of the divine presence, as it appeared many times in various forms. In other words, God’s glory identified itself with the rejected Messiah by receiving Him (*reception* implies *identification*). This is why we read in Luke 9:51, “When the time had come for Him to be received up.” He was on a path that led Him to be *received up* by the heavens, even though – and perhaps also because – He was rejected on earth.

The expression “out of their sight” indicates that the Lord Jesus disappeared from the disciples’ physical eyes. Later in Acts, in connection with Paul’s calling and subsequent ministry, we learn that Christ is visible to the eye of faith (Heb. 2:9, etc.). In other words, although the disciples no longer saw the Lord with their physical eyes, soon – through the coming, indwelling, and ministry of the Holy Spirit – they would see their Messiah *as He is now in heaven*. The revelation of all this and the teaching of it were going to be especially entrusted to Paul: the doctrine and reality of our *union* with Christ and our *unity* with all believers, as members of His body. Acts records the Lord revealing Himself to Paul from the glory. Later, in accordance with Paul’s ministry, through the Holy Spirit, He reveals Himself to all believers. Thus, as Christians, we can see inside the cloud, and even on its other side, that is, into heaven itself (Heb. 2:9; 4:16; 10:19-21).

He “went up” – Christ Ascended

Acts 1:10 reports, “And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as He went up...” We have seen that Christ *was lifted up* and *received* (v.9), but it is also true that *He went up* (v.10) or *ascended* (Jn. 20:17). Literally, we could translate, “as He was going,” “proceeding” or “departing.” Here we notice Christ’s greatness again: He was able to go up by Himself, to ascend into heaven! The same verb is used by the angels in Acts 1:11, saying, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was *taken up* from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him *go* into heaven.” The angels

confirmed Christ's future visible return to this earth, in the same manner and to the same mountain (Zech. 14:4), that is to say, when Israel, finally, will be ready to receive Him (Mt. 23:39). Later in the New Testament, Paul quotes Psalm 68 to describe Christ's victory *in His going up*, "When He *ascended* on high, He led captivity captive, and gave gifts to men" (Eph. 4:8). In a brief parenthesis Paul commented, "Now this, 'He ascended' – what does it mean but that He also first descended into the lower parts of the earth? He who descended is also *the One who ascended* far above all the heavens, that He might fill all things" (Eph. 4:9-10).

Christ's glory is summarized in four⁶ points: (1) He ascended; (2) far above; (3) all the heavens; (4) that He might fill all things. This last point implies that one day the whole universe will bear Christ's stamp, reflecting the beauties of His person! This is the One "who ascended," of whom we read that *He went up*. All this agrees with the description we have seen earlier with respect to *God's work* in seating Christ at His right hand (Eph. 1:20): "(1) Far above all principality and (2) power and (3) might and (4) dominion, and (5) every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come. And (6) He put all things under His feet, and (7) gave Him to be Head over all things to the Church" (vv.21-22). All this also shows the value the Church has according to God's counsel, since the One who is highest in the universe, Christ Himself, is given to her! Although she is subject to Christ, she will not be put under His feet like everything else (Ps. 8:6; Heb. 2:8). The Church will be at His side as His wife, to reign with Him (Rev. 5:10; 22:5).

"He departed from them and He was carried up"

"And it came to pass as He was blessing them, He departed from them and was carried up into heaven" (Lk. 24:51 lit.). The Lord Jesus is the great Blessor, who made His disciples a new company of worshippers, brought close to God (Lk. 24:53). They would continue on earth, whereas God's intervention with respect to Christ who was leaving is indicated in two ways:

1. He *departed* from the disciples; this emphasizes *Christ's action* to leave.
2. He *was carried up* into heaven, which shows *God's work* in taking Him up.

The first point indicates that there is a definite separation between Christ and this world, even though His beloved disciples remained there, though no longer belonging to it. This fits with the idea of Christ's departure (lit. *exodus*), His going out, according to Luke 9:31. The second point demonstrates the pleasure God found in Christ. When used in the active tense the verb "to carry" implies the idea "to lead up" (Mt. 17:1; Mk. 9:2), but Luke 24:51 has the passive tense: Christ "was carried up." The same verb is used for the once-for-all sacrifice that Christ *presented* to God (Heb. 7:27; 9:28; 1 Pet. 2:24) and for Abraham *offering* his son (Jas. 2:21). This verb is also found in connection with our worship (Heb. 13:15; 1 Pet. 2:5). Perhaps we may draw the following conclusions from these thoughts:

1. Christ, the perfect Sacrifice, *presented Himself to God*, offering Himself up, to God's delight.
2. Because of that, *Christ was received by God* and led up into heaven, being God's pleasure.

⁶ In Scripture, the number *four* indicates what is *universal* (four winds, four corners of the earth) and also has attached to it the concept of *testing* and of *what is being tested*. With respect to man, this testing always implies failure (cf. Numbers), whereas with Christ, all the testings only demonstrated His perfections.

3. This does not set aside the other thought we saw before, namely that *Christ was able to ascend*, to go up, in the value of His own Person and on the basis of His sacrifice.

Parenthesis as to the Rapture of the Church

From another perspective, in connection with the enmity of this world placed under its wicked ruler, Satan, it is also stated that Christ was *seized* or *snatched away*⁷ (Rev. 12:5). This particular verb occurs 14 times in the Greek New Testament and is also used with respect to the rapture of the Church (1 Th. 4:17). While the other aspects (*go up, taken up, ascend, etc.*) each have their own emphasis, the enemy's violent opposition caused God to *seize* "the male child" away (Revelation 12 combines the past, the present and the future, put together into one amazing picture). God will have Christ in heaven until the time of His reign in public glory will come, when His enemies will be made His footstool. The thought of a "delay" (*until*) of Christ's public reign, agrees with what Peter said in Acts 3:21, "whom heaven must receive until the times of restoration of all things." The verb Peter used combines the idea of *receiving* with *welcoming* (as for instance in Lk. 2:28; 8:31). In this way, heaven *received* or *welcomed* God's Messiah. The expression "*must receive*," emphasizes a moral principle, for this *must* is because of Christ's work and virtues (for more on this particular verb *must*, see the overview at the end of chapter 10). And so God exalted Him (Acts 2:33) for as long as the earth would not welcome Him (cf. Mt. 23:39b).

MORE COMMENTS ON CHRIST'S GREATNESS – "I ASCEND"

The Lord's personal greatness is particularly the subject of John's Gospel. In addition to our study about Christ's *going up* and His *being taken up* into heaven, let us consider the various ways the Lord spoke about this theme in the fourth Gospel, "No one has *ascended* to heaven but He who came down from heaven, that is, the Son of Man who is in heaven" (Jn. 3:13). This is consistent with what we saw earlier in Ephesians 4, but John emphasized an aspect that was new (i.e. not mentioned in the other Gospels). The One who *ascended* is the same Person who *is* already there: unfathomable mystery (His humanity and deity in one Person can be distinguished but cannot be separated)! Nicodemus saw Christ as a miracle worker and did not recognize Him in His true greatness, even though Isaiah had written about this mystery many years before:

"Who has believed our report? And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed? For He shall grow up before Him as a tender plant, and as a root out of dry ground. He has no form or comeliness; and when we see Him, There is no beauty that we should desire Him. He is despised and rejected by men, a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And we hid, as it were, our faces from Him; He was despised, and we did not esteem Him" (Isa. 53:1-3).

Who can fathom the depth of Christ's statement to Nicodemus (Jn. 3:13)? At the very moment He was speaking with him, He "is in heaven"! He was there before His incarnation and will continue to be there because He is over all things, God blessed forever (Rom. 9:5). This is confirmed in the statement the Lord made in Capernaum (Jn. 6:59), "What then if y o u should see the Son of Man *ascend* where He was before?" (Jn. 6:62). In John 20:17 we

⁷ This passage *implies* the Rapture which is not taught in Revelation, but which is *illustrated* by what John experienced, "Come up here ... Immediately I was in the Spirit; and behold, a throne set in heaven, and One sat on the throne" (Rev. 4:1-2). The call John heard and the transfer he experienced *typify* the rapture of the Church and of the OT believers (which is *taught* in 1 Th. 4:13-18; 1 Cor. 15:23, 52; Heb. 11:40).

read, “Jesus said to her, Do not cling to Me, for I have not yet ascended to My Father; but go to My brethren and say to them, ‘I *am ascending* to My Father and y o u r Father, and to My God and y o u r God.’” Mary of Magdala had to learn (and so do we) that her risen Lord belonged to a new order of things. The context emphasizes that He would ascend in a new capacity, so that *as glorified Man* He would be where He as the eternal *Son* had been before and will be forever (cf. Jn. 17:1-5; Phil. 2:6-9). Besides this truth, Christ’s remarks to Mary also emphasize the wonderful link that now existed between the Lord Jesus *in resurrection* and His disciples on earth (and not before): a new generation identified *with Him* (Jn. 20:19-22). Besides this relationship on earth, Christ associated them *with Himself* as the One who *ascended*. Thus the Lord confirmed another aspect of the relationship between Him and all believers of the era of grace (as shown in the disciples): as the risen Man, He has a new and intimate relationship with His God and Father, who is now their God and Father as well.

Contrasts between David and the Messiah

“For David *did not ascend* into the heavens, but he says himself: ‘The LORD said to my Lord, Sit at My right hand’” (Acts 2:34). This quote from Psalm 110 underlines a point made before, but worth repeating: the one aspect – *to ascend* (Christ’s act) – cannot be detached from the other – *to make Him go up* (God’s act). The Lord’s present session at God’s right hand, by His invitation, implies that He was able to ascend, something that neither David nor anybody else could ever have done. “But the righteousness of faith speaks in this way, “Do not say in y o u r heart, ‘*Who will ascend* into heaven?’ (that is, to bring Christ down from above)” (Rom. 10:6). Faith does not reason or argue but simply accepts God’s thoughts. This point implies that one who believes, has come to the end of self and no longer expects anything on the basis of his own efforts, but sees himself as declared righteous by God’s grace, through Christ’s work and by faith. If a question arises of *human efforts* for salvation or sanctification, this affects the person and work of the only One who was *able to ascend*, because He completely satisfied God’s righteous requirements. For Christ to ascend, three additional glories are implied; and these are linked with His going up:

1. “And I, if *I am lifted up* from the earth, will draw all to Myself” (Jn. 12:32, 34). Lifted up means *elevated* or *exalted*. At the cross (the place of ignominy) God made Christ the centre of attraction for the whole universe, whereas “the prince of this world” was *cast out* (Jn. 12:31). As we have seen before, He fills or will fill all and all things (Col. 3:11; Eph. 1:23): the One who *draws* is also the One who *fills*, for in God’s universe everything depends on the Lord Jesus. And ... everything is based on His sufferings (see Jn. 12:24, 27).
2. “Seeing then that we have a great High Priest, *who has passed through the heavens*, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession” (Heb. 4:14). In Hebrews, Christ’s greatness is seen in many different ways. Linked with Christ’s going up (He *went up* and *ascended* into the heavens) it is also stated that He *passed through* the atmospheric and starry heavens. How this highlights His greatness! It implies another *contrast* with David, even though many *parallels* exist between the Messiah and him as well.
3. “For such a High Priest was fitting for us, holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and *has become higher* than the heavens” (Heb. 7:26). In addition to these two points, this last verse underlines another aspect of the greatness of the One who is greater than David: He is now exalted *higher than the heavens*. This point also shows the

greatness of the company of priestly sons (one of the themes in Hebrews) of which family the glorified Christ is the Head: it is fitting that this company of sons would have “such a High Priest”!

All this is in harmony with Philippians 2:10, “Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name.”

“I Go” or “I Am Going” – And Yet “I Am”

“Now before the feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that His hour had come that He should *depart* from this world to the Father, having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end” (Jn. 13:1). No greater love exists than His! In order to understand the true nature of the Lord’s departure (His going to God) it may be helpful to compare His words with two other statements using the same verb *depart* or *pass* (Gr. *metabainō*), one by the Lord and the other by John, the disciple whom He loved:

“Most assuredly, I say to y o u, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has *passed* from death into life” (Jn. 5:24). “We know that we have *passed* from death to life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love his brother abides in death” (1 Jn. 3:14). “Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He had come from God and *was going to God...*” (Jn. 13:3, was *departing*, or *going to*). Compare this with, “And when He *brings out* His own sheep, He *goes before* them; and the sheep *follow* Him, for they know His voice” (Jn. 10:4).

There are many thoughts in these verses, but the point to emphasize now is the link between His *going to God* and His *going before* the sheep. Our Lord’s leading His sheep implies, ultimately, that He will bring them into the Father’s house. In addition to this, a marked difference can be noted between His true sheep and the religious people of His days:

“Then Jesus said to them, “I shall be with y o u a little while longer, and then *I go* to Him who sent Me” (Jn. 7:33). “Jesus answered and said to them, “Even if I bear witness of Myself, My witness is true, for I know where I came from and where *I am going*; but y o u do not know *where I come from* and *where I am going*” (Jn. 8:14). “Then Jesus said to them again, “*I am going* away, and y o u will seek Me, and will die in y o u r sin. Where *I go* y o u cannot come” (Jn. 8:21).

The distinction between the religious Jews and true disciples is clear: “Little children, I shall be with y o u a little while longer. Y o u will seek Me; and as I said to the Jews, ‘Where *I am going*, y o u cannot come,’ so now I say to y o u” (Jn. 13:33).

The Disciples’ Questions in View of Christ’s Going Away

The further distinction and deeper dimension is seen in the way our Lord responds to Simon Peter’s question, “Lord, where are You going?” Jesus answered him, “Where *I am going* you cannot follow Me now, but you shall follow Me afterward” (Jn. 13:36). Then the Lord explains more specifically: “In My Father’s house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told y o u. *I go* to prepare a place for y o u. And if I go and prepare a place for y o u, I will come again and receive y o u to Myself; that *where I am*, there y o u may be also. And where I go y o u know, and the way y o u know. Thomas said to Him, ‘Lord, we do not know *where You are going*, and how can we know the way?’” (Jn. 14:2-5). This question caused the Lord to answer, “Jesus said to him, ‘I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me’” (Jn. 14:6). These are profound statements! *Disciples* have the task of representing their *Master* in this world while He is absent. “Most assuredly, I

say to y o u, he who believes in Me, the works that I do he will do also; and greater works than these he will do, because *I go to My Father*” (Jn. 14:12). As long as the Holy Spirit had not yet come, the Twelve were unable to grasp such profound statements, “But now *I go away to Him who sent Me, and none of y o u asks Me, ‘Where are You going?’*” (Jn. 16:5). “Then some of His disciples said among themselves, “What is this that He says to us, ‘A little while, and y o u will not see Me; and again a little while, and y o u will see Me’; and, ‘because *I go to the Father?’*” (Jn. 16:17). “In My Father’s house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told y o u. *I go to prepare a place for y o u*” (Jn. 14:2). “Y o u have heard Me say to y o u, ‘I am going away and coming back to y o u.’ If y o u loved Me, y o u would rejoice because I said, ‘*I am going to the Father,*’ for My Father is greater than I” (Jn. 14:28). These statements do not contradict Christ’s words about His being in heaven (Jn. 3:13)! “If anyone serves Me, let him follow Me; and *where I am*, there My servant will be also. If anyone serves Me, him My Father will honour” (Jn. 12:26).

The Mystery of Christ’s Person

Although we will not be able to understand this fully, the secret of the apparent contradictions lies in the greatness of Christ’s Person. “Jesus said to them, ‘Most assuredly, I say to y o u, before Abraham was, I AM.’” A separate study is needed to consider the great “I am,” which is one of the main themes of this exceptional Gospel. This verse is quoted to suggest that an obvious link exists between “I am, I go, I ascend,” etc. That is why it was so important for Saul of Tarsus to recognize the Lord’s true identity. “Then the Lord said, ‘I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting’” (Acts 9:5; 22:8; 26:15). This implies that Christ is the “I AM” (cf. Rev. 1:8, 17; 2:23; 21:6; 22:16) as well as *Jesus* or *Yeshoua* (“Yahweh is salvation”). The Jews did not accept the truth that Lord Jesus is God, i.e. Yahweh Himself, nor did they recognize Him as their Messiah. That is why John concludes his Gospel saying, “These are written that y o u may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing y o u may have life in His name” (Jn. 20:31). John’s writings elaborate on the Lord’s greatness, as He is also “the Son of the Father” (2 Jn. 3), a relationship that was later denied by some in the Christian profession (1 Jn. 2:22; 2 Jn. 7, 9). However, we confirm that “the Son of the Father” (2 Jn. 3) is also “the Man Christ Jesus” (1 Tim. 2:5) who was *taken up* and *received up* into heaven (3:16) after having been rejected on earth. He is also Jehovah (Yahweh or YHWH) Himself, the great “I AM.” Therefore, He was able to say, while speaking on earth with Nicodemus, that He is “the Son of man who is in heaven” (Jn. 3:13)! Let us meditate on His matchless perfections and qualities, and worship Him!

BACKGROUND STUDY – THE STORY OF JUDAS ISCARIOT

One day during the ten days of prayer in the upper room, Peter stood up and showed how God’s word was fulfilled in what Judas *Iscaiot* (*man of Keriot*) had done and in what had happened to him, subsequently (Acts 1:15-20). Judas had been one of the Twelve and had been chosen and called by the Lord Jesus to follow Him and to be sent out by Him (Mt. 10:4; Mk. 3:19; Lk. 6:16). Judas’ second name indicates that he was from Judea (Keriot was in the realm of that tribe or perhaps referred to Jerusalem’s suburbs) and so he was the only non-Galilean, for the other disciples were all from Galilee (Acts 1:11). We do not know what motivated Judas to follow the Lord, nor can we solve the question why such a man was chosen for the office of an apostle, but the fact that he was, clearly shows the extent of God’s grace. When the Twelve were travelling with the Lord, receiving money and other offerings

while distributing to the poor, one of them was needed to function as treasurer. This responsibility was given to Judas, but Scripture tells us, “He was a thief, and had the money box; he used to take what was put in it” (Jn. 12:4-6; 13:29). However, this secret habit – not corrected, despite the Lord’s presence and warnings (cf. Jn. 6:70-71) – led to his further decline. And so at Bethany (Jn. 12:3-9), Judas protested Mary’s use of the costly perfume to anoint Christ’s feet and head (Mt. 26:6-13; Mk. 14:3-9). Mary’s worship triggered Judas’ complaint that she was wasting money. This showed what kind of spirit it was that would lead him to betray his Lord. Even after the Lord had defended Mary, Judas⁸ could have repented. Instead, he hardened himself further, which resulted in the predictable consequences, “He who hardens his heart shall fall into evil” (Prov. 28:14b; cf. 29:1; 1:24-31).

Judas’ Betrayal of the Master

Just before the feast of the Passover, Judas went to the chief priests, agreeing to betray the Lord Jesus to them for a sum of money (Mt. 26:14-16; Mk. 14:10-11; Lk. 22:3-6). It seems that Judas acted in total secrecy, so that his treachery was unknown to the other disciples. Judas was present at the beginning of the Last Supper, his feet were washed. And so he heard those solemn words, “Y o u are clean, but not all of y o u,” as well as the explanation of Christ’s actions (Jn. 13:10-11). Even at this point, Judas could have repented. Then, lying down at supper close to the Lord, he heard Him tell the disciples, “One of y o u will betray Me” and he asked, as did the others, “Surely not I, Lord?” (Judas was the only one who said, “Rabbi,” for he had allowed Satan to become his “lord”). After Judas had received the portion for the guest of honour at the meal, another token of God’s grace, he rose from the feast, at which point Satan entered him (Mt. 26:20-25; Lk. 22:3; Jn. 13:26-30). He then heard Christ say to him, “What you do, do quickly.” It was not long after this that he completed the betrayal. Judas knew the garden where the Lord and the disciples often went, and so he arrived there, accompanied by a band of officers and servants to whom he made known⁹ his Master with a kiss (Mt. 26:47-49; Mk. 14:43-45; Lk. 22:47-48; Jn. 18:1-5). The Lord replied to this act with words of stern, sad rebuke, “Judas, are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss?” (Lk. 22:48). Could Judas not have repented, even at this point?

Judas’ Death – The Field Bought in Judas’ Name

Judas may have thought that the Lord Jesus would liberate Himself, as on other occasions when people had not been able to capture Him (Lk. 4:30; Jn. 10:39). The initial response of all falling down before Him in the garden, clearly indicated Christ’s power, being the “I AM” (Jn. 18:6). But Judas had not reckoned with God’s plans. When he saw that the Lord was

⁸ *Judas* was a common first century name, indicating eight different persons in the New Testament: (1) Judas Iscariot, the betrayer and one of the twelve apostles (Mt. 10:4); (2) Judas the son of James, and also one of the twelve apostles (Lk. 6:16); (3) Judas, a brother of Jesus (Mt. 13:55); (4) Judas, Paul’s host in Damascus (Acts 9:11); (5) Judas, called Barsabbas, a leading Christian in Jerusalem and a companion of Paul (Acts 15:22); (6) Judas, a revolutionary leader (Acts 5:37); (7) Juda or Judah, an otherwise unknown person in the genealogy of Jesus (Lk. 3:30); (8) Judah, a son of Jacob in the genealogy of the Lord Jesus and head of one of the Israelite tribes (Mt. 1:2; Rev. 7:5).

⁹ The plan was that Judas would identify the Lord to the soldiers, at a place away from the multitudes. At that very occasion, John draws our attention to our Lord’s magnificent greatness, since He identified Himself by asking, “Whom are y o u seeking?” and answering, “I am” – while protecting His disciples (Jn. 18:4-8). Thus He manifested His greatness, as all had to retreat and then fall down before Him (v.6).

condemned, his conscience was stricken. Returning to the priests, he confessed the crime he had committed and threw down the money, but they refused to take it (Mt. 27:3-5). Judas' confession indicated that he felt sorry: there was *remorse*, but no true *repentance* (cf. 2 Cor. 7:9-10). Feeling, perhaps, that there was no forgiveness for him, that he was indeed, "the son of perdition" (Jn. 17:12), "he went away and hanged himself" (Mt. 27:5), going "to his own place" (Acts 1:25). Two passages describe those latter events (Mt. 27:5; Acts 1:16-25), seemingly with some discrepancy. Matthew records that Judas "threw the pieces of silver into the temple sanctuary and departed; and he went away and hanged himself" (NAS). In Acts, Peter gives an account that may seem contradictory:

- Instead of throwing the money into the Temple, Judas bought a field with it.
- Instead of hanging himself, he "falling headlong, he burst open ... his entrails gushed out."
- For this reason (not because the priests had bought it with the price of blood) the field was called, "Akeldama, that is Field of Blood" (Acts 1:19).

What did really happen? It seems that Judas hanged himself, probably with a girdle or belt; later, this may have broken or become untied (we don't know). Anyway, his dead body was discovered, probably early in the morning. According to Jewish law, such a body rendered the city unclean for the celebration of the Passover.¹⁰ The religious authorities, evidently, decided to have Judas' body¹¹ thrown over the city wall onto the sharp rocks below, leading to the valley of Hinnom, inflicting the wounds mentioned by Peter in Acts 1 (and have him buried later). Another scenario may have been that Judas hanged himself on a tree, perhaps a dead tree, and that the branch broke off, or the rope broke, causing his dead body to fall down the rocks.

The Predicted Curse and its Fulfilment – Prophecy's Past, Present and Future Combined

As far as the money is concerned in the above accounts, the following explanation should be considered. According to Jewish law, it was not permitted to accept money into the temple treasury that had been unlawfully gained, and then use it for the purchase of sacred things. Under such circumstances, the law indicated that the money was to be restored to the donor. As Judas was no longer there, the money could only be spent for the general public's interest. Although Judas had died, the law considered the money as still belonging to him. Therefore, the field was bought "in his name," so that the purchase of the well-known "potter's field" (Mt. 27:10) was legally ascribed to Judas (Acts 1:18). And in all probability, it was there that he was buried, in the field of blood (v.19). Through the described procedure of buying that specific field, Jeremiah's prophecy was fulfilled: the field *Akeldama* was part of the valley of

¹⁰ The morning burnt offering of that day was to be combined with a special offering for the occasion of Passover, a portion especially designated for the priests, according to rabbinic law. For this reason, the religious leaders did not enter Pilate's office, that they should not be defiled and be unable to eat from that Passover sacrifice (Jn. 18:28). Each Jewish family had already celebrated the Passover on the previous night, which was the beginning of the same day according to Jewish reckoning (evening – morning).

¹¹ It is striking to note that the dead body of the wicked king Jehoiakim was thrown away, similar to what happened to Judas, with the prediction that none of his seed would sit on David's throne (Jer. 36:30; 22:29-30). Joseph, Mary's husband, was of this Davidic line (cf. Mt. 1:11-16). It was, therefore, from another line of David's descendants, through his mother Mary, "the Virgin" (Isa. 7:14), that the Lord Jesus was borne as "the Seed of the woman" (Gen. 3:15), to sit one day on David's throne (Lk. 1:32).

Hinnom, which was under the curse pronounced by Jeremiah (Jer. 19), “the valley of slaughter” (Jer. 7:32; 19:6). Thus, by buying this particular field, the leaders also “bought” the curse that belonged to it, even though it was bought for the purpose of burying the non-Jewish dead. In Jeremiah’s days, the moral reason for the curse had been the sheer idolatry of the people. In Matthew’s account, this idolatry was “compounded” with their rejection of the Messiah, “His blood be on us and on our children” (Mt. 27:25). The curse they had called for, later came upon them at the time of Jerusalem’s destruction in 70 AD, when they buried the dead till there was no more room found for them. Prophecy connects different events of various times (past, present and future; e.g. Rev. 12). The passages in Jeremiah are “interconnected,” just as Matthew did in writing 27:6-10, when he linked Zechariah 11:12-13 (the price with which the leaders had evaluated the Messiah) with Exodus 21:32 (the price of a dead slave) and then with the curse that rested upon the field (Jer. 19:1-15; 7:32), and so with the events in the days of the Lord Jesus. They are also linked with events when the temple and the city were destroyed under Nebuchadnezzar, with the destruction around 40 years after Messiah was “cut off” (Dan. 9:26) under Titus *and* with the future destruction (Dan. 9:27).

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