

A THEOLOGICAL ANALYSIS AND
INTERPRETATION OF THE
ASCENSION OF CHRIST

by

Ronald L. Beabout

Submitted in partial fulfillment of requirements
for the degree of Master of Theology in
Grace Theological Seminary
May 1983

Title: A THEOLOGICAL ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF THE
ASCENSION OF CHRIST
Author: Ronald L. Beabout
Degree: Master of Theology
Date: May, 1983
Advisors: Dr. John C. Whitcomb and Dr. John J. Davis

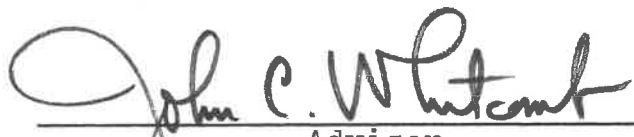
The ascension of Jesus Christ follows from all the events of His career. It is the natural consequence of who He had shown Himself to be: the incarnate Son of God who came to reconcile men to God. Although the ascension was a great theme in the preaching and doctrine of the ancient church, it has since been emphasized only sporadically in church teaching down through the centuries. Greater stress has been placed upon the virgin birth, dual nature, miraculous ministry, vicarious death, and resurrection of Christ, to the great neglect of His ascension. While the liberal controversies of the early twentieth centuries provoked a resurgence of study on the doctrine, it has suffered a demise once more, and a contemporary treatment is in order.

A survey of the history of Christian thought on the ascension doctrine reveals its prominence in the post-canonical church, despite the irregular availability of the New Testament record. Its development reached its zenith in the post-Nicene teachings of Ambrose and Augustine, but then declined during the Middle Ages because of Rome's traditionalism and the lack of independent scholarship. The Reformation brought a revival of interest in the writings of Luther and Calvin, with the latter forming a doctrinal format which became the mainstay of Evangelical theology. But once again the ascension nearly disappeared in the centuries to follow, as rationalism sought to destroy its epistemological basis in the Scriptures. It is only because of the work of conservatives such as Milligan and Swete that the systematic teaching of the ascension has endured for the twentieth-century church.

The New Testament witness to the ascension is a complete one, since much of its content assumes the doctrine. In two passages, Luke 24:50-53 and Acts 1:2-12, the ascension is presented directly, and in significant historical detail. As a result, much of the grammatical construction is useful in formulating Christological doctrine. It is this detailed discussion of the ascension which enables the interpreter to deal with its attendant problems, while retaining the authority and inerrancy of Scripture.

Since so much of the New Testament rests on the ascension of Christ, as well as His birth, resurrection, and second advent, a theological interpretation of the doctrine can be substantially delineated. The purpose, necessity, nature, and results of the ascension find their expression in the exalted Christ, to whom every knee will bow and every tongue confess Him to be the Lord of all.

Accepted by the Faculty of Grace Theological Seminary
in partial fulfillment of requirements for the degree
Master of Theology



Adviser



Adviser

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	1
Backdrop to the Study	1
The Need for the Study	2
Purpose of the Study	5
Procedure for the Study	6
Chapter	
I. AN HISTORICAL SURVEY OF THEOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENTS ON THE ASCENSION OF CHRIST	8
The Ancient Church	8
The Apostolic Period	8
The Ante-Nicene Period	9
Ignatius (?-117).	9
Justin Martyr (100?-165)	10
Irenaeus (115-200?)	12
Tertullian (160-230?)	13
Origen (185?-254?)	15
Eusebius of Caesarea (260?-339)	16
The Post-Nicene Period	17
Ambrose (340?-397).	17
Chrysostom (345?-407)	20
Augustine (354-430)	20
The Medieval Church	21
The Reformation Church	23
Martin Luther	23
John Calvin	24
The Modern Church	26
Summary	27
II. AN ANALYSIS OF BIBLICAL AND EXEGETICAL FACTORS CONCERNING THE ASCENSION OF CHRIST	29
New Testament Overview	29
The Synoptic Gospels	29
John	30
Acts	31
Paul	32
Hebrews	32
Peter	33
Revelation	34
Terms Used to Describe The Ascension	34
Summary	36

III. A DISCUSSION OF PROBLEMS APPERTAINING TO THE ASCENSION OF CHRIST	38
Number of Ascensions	38
Location of Heaven	40
Location of Christ	41
Summary	43
IV. A THEOLOGICAL INTERPRETATION OF THE ASCENSION OF CHRIST	45
The Reasons For Delaying The Ascension	45
The Necessity Of The Ascension	47
The Nature Of The Ascension	48
The Results Of The Ascension	49
Summary	51
CONCLUSION	54
APPENDIX A	57
APPENDIX B	58
APPENDIX C	60
BIBLIOGRAPHY	61

INTRODUCTION

Backdrop to the Study

Having endured the cross in fulfillment of prophecy (Isa 53:1-12), Jesus Christ has taken His place of sovereignty and honor (Rom 1:3) at the right hand of majesty on high (Col 3:1). It was not possible that death could hold Him (Acts 2:24). He who has life in Himself (Jn 1:4; 9:5) could not be contained in a tomb. Jesus lives as victor over man's final enemy, death (1 Cor 15:26). It is the constant affirmation of the New Testament, and the zealous proclamation of the Church, that Christ is risen.¹

However, in the early church, not only was the risen Christ declared, but also the ascended Lord (Acts 1:2, 9, 11; 2:33; 3:21; 7:55; 9:3; 22:6; 26:12; Rom 8:34; Eph 1:20; 4:10; Phil 2:9; 1 Tim 3:16; Heb 4:14; 8:1; 9:12, 24; 10:12; 12:2; and 1 Pet 3:22).² The disciples knew Christ was raised from the dead and they watched Him ascend. God highly exalted Him with a name above every name. Jesus had declared before the high priest and the Sanhedrin that He

¹1Cor 15:3-7. This passage represents the epitome of the gospel preached by the early church, which was Christocentric in thrust, presenting Jesus in all His offices for the purpose of evangelism and edification.

²For a comprehensive listing of passages, consult Appendix A at the conclusion of this study.

would be given a place at the right hand of power. Now He is there, the enthroned Lord of all.

This glorious event was prophesied in the Old Testament (Ps 68:18; 110:1; Isa 52:13), and by Christ Himself, who applied the opening words of Psalm 110 to His messiahship.¹ The practical bearing of Christ's enthronement is given a large place in the New Testament epistles, and its soteriological significance is also emphasized (Rom 8:33-34). More particularly it may be stated that the ascension declares Christ's reinstatement into His heavenly glory. It marks the completeness of His atoning sacrifice, and it assures for us the permanency of His priestly ministry.²

The ascension of Jesus follows from all the events of His career: indeed the resurrection without the ascension would be incomplete. It is the natural consequence of who He had shown Himself to be: the incarnate Son of God who came in order to reconcile men to God.

The Need for the Study

Although the ascension of Christ was a great theme in the preaching and doctrine of the early church, it has since been emphasized only sporadically in church teaching

¹H. Dermot McDonald, Jesus--Human and Divine (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1968), p. 132.

²Ibid.

down through the centuries.¹ Greater stress has been placed in theology upon the virgin birth, dual nature, miraculous ministry, vicarious death, and resurrection of Christ, to the great neglect of His ascension.²

It was not until the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that Christian scholarship devoted strict attention once more to the Lord's ascension. In response to the numerous liberal accounts of the life of Christ and books on Christology, in which the historicity of the ascension was denied, conservative theologians (mostly British) penned works which upheld the gospel accounts as being literally true. Some of these volumes focused solely on the ascension, dealing with its ramifications and treating the problems posed by the liberals.³

However, after the liberal controversy died down,

¹See John F. Walvoord, "The Ascension of Christ," Bibliotheca Sacra 121 (January-March 1964):3-12.

²Let it be stated at the outset that this writer does not condemn the Christian community at large for this omission. It is understandable that greater emphasis is laid on these doctrines, due to their preponderance in the gospels, and the centrality of Christ's death and resurrection in Paul's epistles. Concurring with this opinion is David P. Scaer, "Jesus Did Not Leave--He Reigns Through Us," Christianity Today 26 (May 21, 1982):24-25: "But there must be more . . . the church must see a greater place for this doctrine."

³The key books were by William Milligan, The Ascension of Christ (London: Macmillan, 1891, and its subsequent editions); and Henry Barclay Swete, The Ascended Christ (London: Macmillan, 1910). Unfortunately, while these pioneer works re-established serious study on the doctrine, the contents are focused more on the session of Christ.

the ascension was ignored as a doctrine once more. This contemporary neglect can be observed in all theological systems, whether conservative or liberal in orientation.¹ In non-conservative circles, the chief reason lies without question in the scientific empiricism which has become so predominant since the last decades of the nineteenth century. The biblical accounts of the ascension came to be regarded as naïvely pre-Copernican, and therefore non-literal/historical.²

Conservatives are also guilty of overlooking the ascension. "It has been overshadowed, on the one hand, by the importance of the incarnation, the death, and the resurrection of Christ; and, on the other hand, it has been eclipsed by the present work and future work of Christ."³ The second coming of Jesus has become the focal point of Christological study, with its consequential significance for the millennium. In a recent article David P. Scaer, a noted Lutheran theologian, rebukes the conservative academic community by stating:

In this century, conservative Protestant theology has been so concerned with defending the historical character of Jesus' virgin birth and resurrection that his

¹J. G. Davies, He Ascended Into Heaven (London: Lutterworth, 1958), p. 9. The reader can discover this by perusing any systematic theology, textbook on Christ's life and ministry, or the indices of any widely-read journals, published since 1935.

²Ibid.

³Walvoord, "The Ascension of Christ," p. 3 (emphasis mine).

ascension has received relatively little theological attention. It is handled in only a few pages--sometimes a few paragraphs--in most traditional dogmatical textbooks. Frequently, it seems that the Ascension is handled in such a way that it does little more than provide the best explanation of why Jesus is not with us today,¹ as he was with his disciples after his resurrection.¹

Purpose of the Study

The writer of this paper has discovered only two major works, the only ones to have appeared in the last fifty years, which deal specifically with the ascension of Christ.² Articles have appeared on occasion, but nearly all of these have accentuated the results of the ascension--the priestly ministry of Jesus, the sending of the promised Holy Spirit, and the expected return of Christ--while failing to deal with the actual event itself.

¹Scaer, "Jesus Did Not Leave--He Reigns Through Us," p. 24.

²The first is a published volume from Great Britain, already cited in this paper, by J. G. Davies, He Ascended Into Heaven. While it is a cogent and well-researched book, it is representative of a more liberal approach, demonstrated by Davies' denial of the Lucan accounts as consistent and therefore without error. The second work is an unpublished doctoral dissertation by Robert D. Kaylor, "The Ascension Motif in Luke-Acts, the Epistle to the Hebrews, and the Fourth Gospel," (Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina, 1964). Although the paper is extensive in its treatment (234 pages), the author is only interested in the literary constructions of the ascension event by the various N. T. authors. Kaylor has no consideration for the divine authority of Scripture, and does not regard the life of Jesus, let alone His ascension, as being historically true. In addition, Kaylor's exegesis is found only in making literary comparisons, resulting in little or no theological formulations.

While recognizing the necessity and relevancy of the priesthood of Christ, the coming of the Holy Spirit, and the second advent of our Lord, it is nevertheless the opinion of this writer that a work of some length should be produced which focuses on the event of the ascension and its theological implications. Hence, the purpose of this thesis is to present a fresh investigation of the actual ascension of Jesus Christ, including its significance in Christology.¹

Procedure for the Study

The procedure to be employed will be to commence with an historical survey of the doctrine of the ascension. The purpose in presenting this chapter is two-fold: (1) to show the development of the doctrine from post-canonical conceptions until its present evangelical forms; and, (2) to demonstrate, with regard to the concerns of this introduction, that the ascension was a significant doctrine throughout most of church history, but especially in the ancient period.²

¹The results of the ascension, and their applications, will be discussed only to give perspective and continuity.

²While recognizing that Scripture should be the primary source when formulating any doctrine of Scripture, it is maintained that contemporary teaching can be predisposed to error or truth on the basis of viewpoints which have been posited for centuries. Valuable lessons can be learned from church history, not the least of which is the private interpretation of Scripture. It should be noted, however, that, while a believer may interpret the Scriptures privately, he can only rarely interpret them in isolation.

Having given this overview, the next two chapters will be concerned with the New Testament witness to the ascension, and theological problems, respectively. Those passages which speak directly of the ascension itself will receive primary treatment, especially Acts 1:2, 9-11, due to their historical detail. Exegetical and hermeneutical factors will be discussed, as well as other passages which refer to the ascension indirectly. Involved in some of these references are problems concerning: (1) the nature of Christ's body in His ascent; (2) accounts which imply more than one ascension; and (3) whether Christ actually returned to heaven.

The final chapter will draw upon the two previous ones, with additional material, to formulate and delineate a theology of the ascension. As stated earlier, other matters regarding Christ's ongoing ministry will be presented to give perspective and continuity. Applications will be made for both Christ and His church (individually and corporately).

It is with the hope that the reader will gain a deeper understanding and appreciation of Christ's ascension that this study is undertaken.

CHAPTER I

AN HISTORICAL SURVEY OF THEOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENTS
ON THE ASCENSION OF CHRIST

This chapter proposes to trace the dogmatic thought of significant theologians concerning the ascension of Christ. While the viewpoints of these thinkers may vary within a given period of history, and from period to period, it is vital to note that there is a unity of belief on the fact of the ascension. It is not until modern times, with the great influx of rationalism and the consequent dissolution of the miraculous and the metaphysical, that the ascension is disbelieved, when referred to at all.

The Ancient Church

The Apostolic Period

The apostles, and their representatives, are the key thinkers regarding the ascension, since they personally witnessed the event itself, or personally experienced the results of it (as in the case of Paul on the road to Damascus). These men are also significant since, under inspiration of the Holy Spirit, they recorded the ascension and its results in the books of the New Testament.

The most direct accounts, written by Luke, reveal historical details which leave no doubt that Christ's

ascension was both real and bodily. The rest of the New Testament intimates the ascension, or assumes it as a basis for other teaching.

The apostolic witness, especially the Lucan accounts, will be dealt with in greater depth throughout the remainder of this paper.

The Ante-Nicene Period

It is beyond the scope of this study to render a detailed account of patristic thinking on the ascension of Christ. The studies which have been devoted to this aspect of the investigation clearly indicate how hesitant the approach to the ascension was at first. There is a discernable echo of the apostolic preaching in these early authors, with frequent mention of the imminence of Christ's return and of His high priesthood, involving of necessity the previous entrance of Christ into heaven.¹

A brief survey of the general trend will be given, indicating possible points of gradual development in the doctrine, from where it was generally implied or mentioned without elaboration, to where it is being interpreted and commented upon more extensively.

Ignatius (?-117)

Perhaps one of the briefest references to the ascension was made by this earliest of apostolic fathers in his

¹J. G. Davies, He Ascended Into Heaven, p. 69.

letter to the Magnesians, about A.D. 110.¹ He exhorts his readers to assemble together, "even to one Jesus Christ, who came forth from one Father and is One and departed unto One,"² i.e. as at the commencement of His earthly ministry He came forth from One, so at the close of His mission He returned to One.

This antithesis of descent and ascent in which the incarnation and the ascension are considered together is a reflection of John's reference to the same in his Gospel.³

Justin Martyr (100?-165)

A more explicit treatment of the ascension is presented by this apologist, who found himself faced with the assaults of Jews and pagans just on the point of this doctrine.⁴ That the ascension was an integral part of Justin's belief is evident from his frequent summaries of what was a developed Christological confession.⁵ This same formula, in

¹Ibid.

²Ignatius Ad magnesios 7.

³Jn 3:13: "No one has ascended into heaven except him who has descended from heaven: the Son of Man who is in heaven."

⁴William H. Marreevee, The Ascension of Christ in the Works of St. Augustine (Ottawa: University of Ottawa, 1967), pp. 6-7.

⁵Justin Apologia 1.21: "We say that the Word, who is the first offspring of God, was begotten without carnal intercourse, Jesus Christ our teacher, and that He was crucified, and died, and rose again, and ascended to heaven."

nearly identical words, is repeated in no fewer than three other passages in his works,¹ and there is no reason to doubt that this represents a faithful reproduction of the apostolic preaching in which the ascension had a necessary place.

But Justin's principle contribution was given in his use of prophetic psalms, which introduced a scriptural basis that would gain momentum in the approach of the early church to the mystery of the ascension. He relates the ascension to the incarnation, as Ignatius did, by referring to Psalm 19:6: "from the highest heaven is his going forth, and he returns to the highest heaven."² The sending of the Holy Spirit is also connected now with the ascension, when Justin quotes Psalm 68:18.³ The "gifts" mentioned in this verse are the gifts of the Spirit, the pentecostal outpouring, also foretold by Joel, which was the consequence of the ascension.⁴

¹Ibid. 1.31, 42, 46.

²Ibid. Dialogus 64.

³Ibid. 87: "The Spirit therefore rested, that is, ceased when Christ came. For, after man's redemption was accomplished by Him, these gifts were to cease among you, and having come to an end in Him, should again be given, as was foretold, by Him, from the grace of His Spirit's powers, to all His believers according to their merits. I have already affirmed, and I repeated that it had been predicted that He would do this after His Ascension into heaven. It was said therefore: 'He ascended on high; he led captivity captive; he gave gifts to the sons of men.'"

⁴Ibid. 39. Ps 68 is also used of the ascension in Dialogus 85, and Apologia 1.51.

With regard to the introduction of this particular feature it should be noted, with Davies, that "by connecting these psalms with the Ascension, Justin added little to the New Testament interpretation of the doctrine, but he did lay the basis of all future exegesis."¹

Irenaeus (115-200?)

Justin marks only the beginning of a greater penetration into the meaning of the ascension. This process was developed further by Irenaeus, who not only continued the device of connecting the Psalms with the ascension, but included the reconciliation of God and man in Christ.² He asserts that Christ is "He who descended and ascended for the salvation of men,"³ and that the Son of God, made the Son of Man, did "ascend to the height above, offering and commending to His Father that human nature which had been made His."⁴

¹Davies, He Ascended Into Heaven, p. 73.

²Irenaeus Adversus haereses 3.18.

³Ibid. 3.6.2. Note the descension/ascension motif which was evident in Ignatius and Justin.

⁴Ibid. 3.19.3. Expanding on this elsewhere, in Demonstratione 5.21.1, he states: "therefore does the Lord profess Himself to be the Son of man, comprising in Himself that original man out of which the woman was fashioned, in order that, as our species went down to death through a vanquished man, so we may ascend to life again through a victorious one . . . in Himself raising up that which was fallen, lifting him up far above the heavens to the right hand of the glory of the Father."

But although Irenaeus may start his scriptural viewpoint with Justin, he advances on the latter by his quotations from the New Testament.¹ Of Irenaeus it is concluded that his contribution lies in his interpretation of the Christological and soteriological content of the ascension.²

Tertullian (160-230?)

The "Father of Latin Theology" is a significant personality in the history of dogmatic thought, since he above all theological antiquity gave to later dogmatics its distinctive forensic stream of consciousness.³ Tertullian penned many theological treatises, but is best remembered for his careful, concise defense of the Christian faith.⁴

Tertullian held to the beliefs of the church concerning Christ,⁵ and in opposition to the various heresies

¹Ibid. 3.10.6: "Towards the conclusion of his Gospel, Mark says: 'So then, after the Lord Jesus had spoken to them, He was received up into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of God,' confirming what had been spoken by the prophet: 'The Lord said to my Lord, Sit on my right hand, until I make Thy foes Thy footstool.'"

²Ibid. 2.32.3: "The Lord rose from the dead on the third day, and manifested Himself to His disciples, and was in their sight received up into heaven." This reads like a summary of either the ending of Mark or the closing verses of Luke, and can be taken as further evidence of Irenaeus' input of the N. T.

³Arthur C. McGiffert, A History of Christian Thought (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1946), p. 7.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Tertullian De praescriptione haereticorum 13: "The rule of faith is . . . that rule by which we believe that there is one, and only one, God, and that He is none other

of his day, he emphasizes the oneness of God, the identity of Jesus with the Messiah of ancient prophecy, the reality of His human conception and the resurrection of the flesh. The majority of his references to the ascension serve not as an exposition, but rather a weapon in his anti-heretical armory.¹

Of particular interest is Tertullian's insistence on the fact that it is the ascended Christ who sends the Holy Spirit.² He also insists on the reality of Christ as man in reference to the ascension.³

In his De resurrectione carnis, the ascension provides Tertullian an opportunity to attack the docetists' denial of the reality of Christ's flesh and its resurrection.

than the Creator of the world, who produced all things out of nothing through His own Word, first of all sent down; that this Word is called His Son, and in the name of God was seen "in divers manners" by the patriarchs, heard at all times in the prophets, and last of all entered into the Virgin Mary by the Spirit and Power of the Father, was made flesh in her womb, and was born of her as Jesus Christ; thereafter He preached the new law and the new promise of the Kingdom of heaven, worked miracles; having been crucified, He rose again the third day, was taken up to heaven and sat down at the right hand of the Father."

¹Davies, He Ascended Into Heaven, p. 82.

²Tertullian De baptismo 10: "The Lord Himself said that the Spirit would not descend on any other condition but that He should first ascend to the Father."

³Ibid. De resurrectione mortuorum 51.2: "For as He has given us the earnest of the Spirit, so has He received from us the earnest of the flesh, and has carried it with Him into heaven as a pledge of that complete entirety which is one day to be restored to it."

Those heretics affirmed that all flesh and blood is excluded from the kingdom of God, but:

Jesus is still sitting there at the right hand of the Father, man yet God--the last Adam, yet the primary Word--flesh and blood, yet purer than ours--who 'shall descend in like manner as He ascended,' the same both in substance and form, as the angels affirmed, so as even to be recognized by those who pierced Him. Designated, as He is, 'the Mediator between God and man,' He keeps in His own self the deposit of the flesh which has been committed to Him by both parties--the pledge and security of its entire perfection. For as 'He has given to us the earnest of the Spirit,' so has He received from us the earnest of the flesh, and has carried it with Him into heaven as a pledge of that complete entirety which is one day to be restored to it.¹

Like Irenaeus before him, Tertullian contributed a deeper christological and soteriological signification to the ascension, and these aspects would be worked out more extensively by theologians who would follow him.

Origen (185-264?)

The ascension was not a focal point of doctrine for Origen, but he recognizes it nonetheless in an affirmation concerning Christ. He states:

Christ Jesus took to Himself a body like our body, differing in this alone, that it was born of a virgin and of the Holy Spirit. And this Jesus Christ was born and suffered in truth and not merely in appearance, and truly died our common death. Moreover he truly rose from the dead, and after the Resurrection companied with His disciples and was then taken up into heaven.²

It is noted then that the ascension is a fact for Origen, yet he moved far from the physical realism of the

¹Ibid. De resurrectione carnis 10, 19, 51.

²Origen De principiis 1.4.

apostles in the New Testament. It was his Hellenistic background that disposed him to give an allegorical interpretation to Christ's ascent.¹ Convinced that God cannot be circumscribed locally and that the Son cannot therefore move spatially when He is said to descend or ascend, Origen interpreted the ascension as a spiritual exaltation rather than physical motion.² Consequently the event is not to be related to spatial categories.

Origen's faulty view of spiritual exaltation over physical motion is one which influenced much of Christendom, and remains to this day in its various liberal and conservative expressions.³

Eusebius of Caesarea (260?-339)

The contribution of this man is different from all the authors considered thus far, in that the latter were

¹Marreevee, The Ascension of Christ in the Works of St. Augustine, pp. 9-10.

²Origen De principiis 23.1: "When it is said that the Father of the saints is in heaven, we must not understand Him to be circumscribed and to dwell in heaven in bodily fashion; for God contained in this way will then be found less than heaven if heaven contains Him. We must believe that all things are contained and held together by Him, by the ineffable power of His Godhead. And in general we must interpret those passages which, in so far as they are taken literally, are thought by the more simple to assert that God is in a place, in conformity with large and spiritual ideas about God."

³For a conservative expression of this, as practiced in Lutheran theology, see the article by Scaer, "Jesus Did Not Leave--He Reigns Through Us." Even the title implies a spiritual exaltation of Christ, to the exclusion of His physical motion into heaven.

primarily interested in the theological understanding of the ascension, while the former is mainly concerned about the historical event. This is exemplified by Eusebius' treatment of the ascent of Christ, in which the historian is content to quote the Acts account with no comment whatsoever.¹

Thus this church father is faithful to the Scriptures, placing the ascension forty days after the resurrection.² Even with no theological comment, Eusebius has attested to a distinction in time between the resurrection and the ascension, which is important to retain when speaking of the exaltation of Jesus Christ.

The Post-Nicene Period

By this time the doctrine of the ascension is a well-developed part of the Christian faith, as persecutions and heresies caused the church to delineate its beliefs. With the Council of Nicea (A.D. 325) and other ecumenical meetings to follow, clearer teachings, particularly in Christology, become evident in the treatises and sermons of the great leaders in the church.³

Ambrose (340?-397)

In his efforts to oppose Arianism, this staunch

¹Eusebius Demonstratio evangelica 6.18.

²Ibid. 8.2.

³Kenneth Scott Latourette, A History of Christianity, 2 vols. (New York: Harper and Row, 1975), 1:153-169.

defender of the faith wrote several treatises, including De fide, in which he rebukes the heretics for their failure to understand Christ from the Scriptures. Employing the psalms as his predecessors did, Ambrose sets forth the ascension as a proof of Christ's deity:

And so when the Lord rose again, and the heights of heaven could not bear the glory of His rising from the dead, who of late, so far as regarded His flesh, had been confined in the narrow bounds of a sepulchre, even the heavenly hosts doubted and were amazed. For a Conqueror came, adorned with wondrous spoils, the Lord was in His holy Temple, before Him went angels and archangels, marvelling at the prey wrested from death, and though they knew that nothing can be added to God from the flesh, because all things are lower than God, nevertheless bearing the trophy of the Cross . . . and the spoils borne by the everlasting Conqueror, they, as if the gates could not afford passage for Him who had gone forth from them . . . , sought some broader and more lofty passage for Him on His return--so entirely had He remained undiminished by His self emptying. . . . Enoch had been translated, Elijah caught up, but the servant is not above his Master, for "No man hath ascended into heaven, but he who came down from heaven"; . . . Enoch then was translated, and Elijah caught up; both as servants, both in the body, but not after resurrection from the dead, nor with the spoils of death and the triumphal train of the Cross had they been seen of angels. And therefore the angels, descrying the approach of the Lord of all, first and only vanquisher of death, bade their princes that the gates should be lifted up, saying in adoration: "Lift up the gates, such as are princes among you, and be ye lifted up, O ye everlasting doors, and the King of glory shall come in." Yet there were still even among the host of heaven, some that were amazed, overcome with astonishment at such pomp and glory that they had never yet beheld, and therefore they asked: "Who is the King of glory?" Others again--those, to wit, who had been present at His rising again, those who had seen or already recognized Him--made reply: "It is the Lord strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle" . . . and back again came the challenge of them that stood astonished: "Who is that King of glory? For we saw Him having neither form nor comeliness; if then it be not He, who is that King of glory?" Whereunto, they which know, answer: "The Lord of hosts, He is the King of

glory." Therefore, the Lord of Hosts, He is the Son.¹

It is again with the aid of another psalm passage (Ps 68:18) that Ambrose connects the ascension of Christ with the sending of the Holy Spirit, which by now is an established feature of the doctrine:

which the Lord Jesus shed forth from heaven, after having been fixed to the gibbet of the Cross, returning with the triumphal spoils of death deprived of its power, as you find it written: "Ascending up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave good gifts to men." . . . And since captive breasts certainly could not receive Him, the Lord Jesus first led captivity captive that our affections being set free, He might pour forth the gift of divine grace.²

But perhaps Ambrose's most noteworthy contribution to the history of the doctrine lies in Christ's ascent being related to His priesthood and the believer's advocacy with the Father. "Christ's purpose in the Incarnation," according to Ambrose, "was to pave for us the road to heaven. Mark how he says: 'I ascend to my Father and to your father, to my God and your God.'"³ When God the Son was incarnate, "He took humanity in that flesh. Hence His death is our death, His resurrection our resurrection, and His ascension our ascension."⁴ So then "in Him we sit at the right hand of the Father, not in the sense that we share His throne, but that we rest in the Body of Christ."⁵

¹Ambrose, De fide 4.5, 6, 8-10, 11-14.

²Ibid. 4.24.

³Ibid. 3.51.

⁴Ibid. 4.7.

⁵Ibid. 4.35.

Chrysostom (345?-407)

At the time of John Chrysostom it seems that the ascension was celebrated on a particular feastday, as evidenced by several of his sermons which were solely devoted to Christ's glorification. The thrust of Chrysostom's messages is that Christ was glorified as a mediator. He draws out this idea particularly well in the following:

While they were watching He was taken up: He was parted from them and was borne up into heaven and a cloud received Him up: and as they were looking into heaven He went. He was received up: He was taken up: He was borne up: He entered: for Jesus did not enter into a holy place made with hands, but into heaven itself, now to appear before God. And not only entered but passed through: "For," says Paul, "we have a great high priest who passed through the heavens," Jesus. He went up: He ascended: He was taken up: He went: He passed through. Take note: He ascended as having authority in order that the saying of the prophet might be fulfilled: "God ascended with a shout."¹

Augustine (354-430)

Augustine's teaching on the ascension centers in his sermons, which are great in number and detailed in content. The theme of each ascension sermon is expressed in four main points: (1) the interpretation of John 3:13; (2) the doctrine of the whole Christ, consisting of head and members; (3) the nature of the bodily ascension; and, (4) the significance of the forty days in reference to the period between

¹Chrysostom Homilia de ascensione 2. Chrysostom interprets the "shout" as a reference to Christ's triumph, in so far as He overcame sin and death, and affirms that He carried up to heaven the trophy, namely, human nature.

the resurrection and the ascension.¹

As an example of Augustine's teaching, the following passage points out his understanding of John 3:13:

Let us not listen to those who deny that our Lord raised His body with Him into heaven, and refer to what is written in the Gospel: "No man hath ascended into heaven, but he that descended out of heaven," and say that because the body did not descend from heaven, it could not have ascended into heaven. For they are without understanding, since the body did not ascend into heaven, because the Lord ascended but the body did not ascend, but was raised into heaven, being raised by Him who ascended. For if anyone descended, the grace of the Lord unclothed from the heights when He descended clothed Himself, and being clothed ascended again, and we say rightly: "No man hath ascended into heaven except He who descended." Let us not consider the clothing which He raised with Himself, but we say that He alone ascended who was clothed.²

The Medieval Church

The ancient church produced an amazingly significant amount of literature on the ascension of Christ, even when due allowance has been made for lack of a widespread availability of the New Testament. Indeed, much more of importance doctrinally was given in those comparatively few years than throughout the next millennium.³ But the initial impetus given to the study of the doctrine quickly lost its momentum after Augustine. The ascension remained an article of faith,

¹Marreeve, The Ascension of Christ in The Works of St. Augustine, pp. 59-90.

²Augustine Sermo 263. The number of Augustine's ascension sermons is too numerous to be represented fairly in this project. For a listing of the sermons, consult the appendix in Davies, He Ascended Into Heaven, pp. 90ff.

³Davies, He Ascended Into Heaven, p. 147.

but during the middle ages it was scarcely an object of absorbing interest.

This neglect of the doctrine of the ascension may be reflected in the tendency of the medieval church to react against original thinking. The task of the theologian was conceived to be not the pursuit of new insights into the nature and meaning of revealed biblical truth, but the cataloguing of intellectual labors from former days. The zenith of independent theological production had been reached, or so it was believed. All that remained was the task of systematization.¹ The error of Rome to elevate the writings of the church fathers to the same level as Scripture certainly contributed to this decay of theological research and creativity.

As a result, the ascension remained an accepted article of belief, but if one wanted to know what was meant by it, one had to consult the pronouncements of an earlier age. Even Thomas Aquinas, the most prominent thinker of the middle ages and father of Catholic theology, is strangely reticent to state his own ideas on the ascension of Christ. Instead, he quoted Augustine, without giving any further commentary.²

If any credit belongs to this period, it is the efforts of the church to preserve the theological treasures of

¹Latourette, A History of Christianity, pp. 269-277.

²Thomas Aquinas Summa Theologica.3.26.2.

the past, thus keeping alive a belief in the ascension as an integral part of the redemptive act of God in Christ.

The Reformation Church

A surge of renewed interest in the ascension of Christ, resulting from the stimulation of theological investigation in Protestantism, occurs in the writings of Luther and Calvin. While their statements are brief, they are a welcome change from the traditionalism of Rome.

Martin Luther (1483-1546)

The theology of Luther is not systematic, but it is submissive to the revelation of Scripture. In opposition to the speculative theology of Rome, which focused on the "hidden God" of medieval scholasticism, Luther championed a theology of God as He is revealed through Christ in the Scriptures.¹

This biblical theology is evident in Luther's treatment of the ascension of Christ. Although unsystematic in presentation, his commentaries on Scripture give an adequate perspective. Concerning the priesthood of Christ in Hebrews 10:19, Luther remarks:

Christ's entry into heaven . . . is also the sacrament of our new life and way, by which we are to seek only heavenly things, where our commonwealth is also (Phil 3:20). . . . For we cross over according to the flesh

¹Paul Althaus, The Theology of Martin Luther, trans. by Robert C. Schultz (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975), p. 222.

and according to the spirit,¹ but Christ crossed over only according to the flesh.¹

Although the reformer maintained that the body of Jesus is present everywhere, Luther was just as certain of Christ's presence in heaven, as Lord of all creation. Commenting on 1 Peter 3:22,² he writes:

The apostle says all of this to explain and strengthen our faith. For Christ also had to ascend into heaven and become Lord over all creatures and wherever there is power, in order that He might also lead us to heaven and make us like Himself. Now this is said for our comfort, in order that we may know that all power in heaven and on earth, even death and the devil, . . . must serve the Lord Christ and lie at His feet.³

For Luther, the ascended Christ is the all-powerful Son of God, exalted with new authority (Matt 28:19), giving believers hope in knowing that they share in His glory--both now and forever.⁴

John Calvin (1509-1564)

The work of this reformer on the doctrine of the ascension is pivotal, since he is the first theologian to systematically treat the subject from a biblical basis. While his discussion is somewhat brief, it is succinct,

¹Martin Luther, Luther's Works, 54 vols. edited by Jaroslav Pelikan (St. Louis: Concordia, 1955-68), vol. 39, p. 225. This comment represents Luther's belief in the ubiquity of the body of Christ.

²"who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers subject to Him."

³Luther, Luther's Works, p. 116.

⁴Althaus, The Theology of Martin Luther, p. 223.

showing the relationship between the ascension on the one hand, and the resurrection or heavenly session on the other hand.¹

Like Luther, Calvin stresses the exalted authority of Christ as being intrinsically related to, and resulting from, His ascension.² The emphasis of Christ's authority by both Calvin and Luther represents a reaction against the authority of Rome, especially the papacy. Christ is the head of the church, not man.

In concluding his treatise, Calvin lists three benefits of Christ's ascension for the believer: (1) the Lord by His ascent opened the way into heaven to sit with God in Him (Eph 2:6);³ (2) Christ appears before the Father as our constant advocate and intercessor (1 Jn 2:1; Heb 7:25);⁴ and, (3) as the Son of God with power and authority (Rom 1:3;

¹John Calvin Institutes of the Christian Religion 2.16.14: "To the resurrection is quite appropriately joined the ascent into heaven. Now having laid aside the shame of the cross, Christ by rising again began to show forth his glory and power more fully. The apostle shows this when he teaches that Christ 'ascended . . . that he might fill all things' (Eph 4:10). . . . he ascended into heaven (Acts 1:3, 9), and is not here: for there 'he sits at the right hand of the Father' (Mark 16:19)."

²Ibid. 2.16.15: "So it was said that Christ in whom the Father wills to be exalted and through whose hand he wills to reign, was received at God's right hand. This is as if it were said that Christ was invested with lordship over heaven and earth, and solemnly entered into possession of the government committed to him--and that he not only entered into possession once for all, but continues in it, until he shall come down on Judgment Day."

³Ibid. 2.16.16.

⁴Ibid.

Phil 2:9-11), Jesus rules over His church by the Holy Spirit which He sent in His name.¹

The Modern Church

Along with the Reformation came the Enlightenment, and its rationalistic philosophy changed the course of academics in the great universities of Europe. Within rationalism is the denial of the supernatural as being active in the stream of human history, as well as the discrediting of divine revelation in Scripture. These related ideas affected theological thinking, to its detriment, over the centuries to follow, even to this day.

In the nineteenth century, the Scriptures came under their most glaring attack to date, and no doctrine was left untouched. The biblical account of Christ's ascension came to be regarded as pre-Copernican, and therefore unhistorical. Only 150 years ago, Friedrich Schleiermacher, the father of neo-Protestantism, saw both the resurrection and the ascension as unnecessary to demonstrate that Jesus Christ was God.² Following in his train of influence, Adolf Harnack demolished the ascension, contriving it as a myth invented by the early church to establish Jesus as superhuman or

¹Ibid.

²Scaer, "Jesus Did Not Leave--He Reigns Through Us," p. 24.

divine, in order to increase His popularity (i.e. Christianity).¹

Harnack's views on the ascension have made a profound impression upon theological scholarship, on both sides of the Atlantic. Even in this century his interpretation is frequently reproduced,² and so if it were not for the Evangelical renewal in both Great Britain and North America at the turn of the century, the ascension as a significant doctrine may have disappeared altogether.³

Summary

The doctrine of Christ's ascension, considered in the history of theological development, had only sporadic significance to the church. It was primary in the teaching of the post-canonical church, despite the irregular availability of the New Testament record. Its development, theologically, reached its zenith in the post-Nicene teachings of such thinkers as Ambrose and Augustine. However, due to the demise of independent scholarship in the Middle Ages, and the incipient traditionalism of the emerging

¹Adolf Harnack, The Expansion of Christianity, English edition (London: Williams and Norgate, 1958), pp. 126-133.

²Rudolf Bultmann, Theology of the New Testament, vol.1 of the English edition (London: SCM, 1956), p. 45.

³Davies, He Ascended Into Heaven, p. 10. As discussed in the introduction, the work of Milligan and Swete restored an interest in the ascension, and presented a defensible, Scriptural treatment of the same.

Church of Rome, the ascension suffered a sudden and almost complete demise.

In the sixteenth century, the great reformers, Luther and Calvin, brought a revival of interest in the ascension, with Calvin forming a doctrinal format which would become the mainstay of much of Evangelical theology. But once more, the ascension was nearly retired in the centuries to follow, as rationalism and empiricism sought to destroy its epistemological basis in the Scriptures. It is only because of God's providence at work in the lives of such conservative scholars as William Milligan and Henry Swete, that the systematic teaching of the ascension of Christ has endured for the twentieth-century church.

CHAPTER II

AN ANALYSIS OF BIBLICAL AND EXEGETICAL FACTORS CONCERNING THE ASCENSION OF CHRIST

The central purpose of this chapter is to present the New Testament passages which deal directly with the ascension itself, and not those which relate the results of it.¹ However, in order to show the a priori importance of this doctrine in the teaching of the apostles, a theological overview of significant New Testament passages will be discussed. In analyzing the key passages mentioned, exegetical factors will be considered, and the study will conclude with a brief treatment of hermeneutical issues relating to the ascension event.

New Testament Overview

The Synoptic Gospels

Among the synoptic writers Luke alone specifically mentions the departure of Jesus after several resurrection appearances.² His record of Jesus' earthly ministry is the

¹These references are: Lk 24:50-53, and Acts 1:2, 9, 11.

²For a thorough discussion of Christ's appearances, consult Henry B. Swete, The Appearances Of Our Lord After The Passion (London: Macmillan, 1915).

most complete, in that it begins with His coming (the birth) and closes with His going (the ascension). The ascension account in Luke 24: 50-51 is brief, but the author presents considerable detail in his parallel passage in Acts 1.¹

Mark's gospel contains a brief mention of the ascension, but only in the conclusion (Mk 16:19), which has been regarded as non-Markan. It is remarkable to note, though, how well Mark's account parallels that of Luke.² Whatever the origin of Mark 16:9-20, it is an early well-attested witness to a strong belief that Jesus did ascend into heaven. In addition, Mark mentions in 16:19 the session of Christ at God's right hand.

John

Although this gospel does not conclude with the event of Christ's ascension, it does provide intimations of it throughout its pages. In 3:13, Jesus states, "No one has ascended into heaven but he who descended from heaven, the Son of man." In 6:62, a question is put by Jesus to His disciples: "Then what if you were to see the Son of

¹A comparison of the two accounts, showing their compatibility, is presented in Appendix B at the conclusion of this paper.

²Indeed, it seems to be based on Luke's gospel. This is the view of Donald Guthrie in his New Testament Theology (Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity Press, 1981), p. 392. A chart giving demonstration of this is in Appendix C at the end of this thesis.

man ascending where he was before?"

A resurrection appearance by Christ to Mary Magdalene is significant because Jesus forbade her to hold Him (20:17), "for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to my brothers and tell them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'"¹

Acts

In contrast to concluding the earthly ministry of Christ with the ascension in his gospel, Luke presents the beginning of Jesus' heavenly ministry (through the Holy Spirit) with the same remarkable event. In Acts 1:1ff. the details of Luke 24:50-53 are given.²

In his account of Peter's first sermon, Luke shows how the ascension was at once interpreted by the first Christians. God had exalted Jesus at His right hand (2:33), as a result of which the outpouring of the Holy Spirit had been given. Psalm 110:1 is cited in support, pointing out that, unlike David, Jesus had ascended into Heaven (2:34).³ Before that "God had exalted him at his right hand" (5:31).

¹A fuller discussion of this is given in chapter 3.

²Homer A. Kent, Jr., Jerusalem To Rome (Winona Lake: BMH, 1972), pp. 23, 25.

³E. M. Blaiklock, The Acts of the Apostles in the Tyndale Bible Commentaries, ed. by R. V. G. Tasker (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959), pp. 59-60.

In 7:55, Stephen saw "Jesus standing at the right hand of God." Paul sees a vision of the risen Christ in Acts 9, and gives a verbal account of this on two later occasions (Acts 13:31; 26:12-15). The importance of the ascension is thus seen to be widely proclaimed among the early Christians.

Paul

There are several passages where the apostle either directly affirms or indirectly implies the fact of the ascension. In Romans 10:6-7 and Ephesians 4:9, 10, Paul introduces an ascent-descent theme based on Deuteronomy 30:12-13 and Psalm 68:18, respectively.¹ Passages which exalt Christ, and thereby assume His ascension, are Philip-
pians 2:6ff., Colossians 3:1, and 1 Timothy 3:16. Other references by the apostle depict Jesus' return from heaven (1 Thes 1:10; 2 Thes 1:7; Phil 3:20), with the assurance that those who are in Christ will also be glorified.

Hebrews

In no part of the New Testament is the ascension so basic as in the epistle to the Hebrews. The presentation of Christ in the epistle sees Him at once seated at the right hand of the Majesty on high (1:3).² This is presented as a

¹Guthrie, New Testament Theology, p. 396.

²Ibid., p. 397. Guthrie states that the "Right Hand of God" is a metaphor expressing honor, authority, and power.

sequel to the purging of sins, but with no specific reference to the resurrection or ascension. But it is inescapable that these intervening events are assumed. This epistle concentrates on Jesus' present ministry, which makes His present status of supreme importance.¹

The Son of God, our great high priest, is said to have "passed through the heavens" (4:14), to be "exalted above the heavens" (7:26), and to have entered a heavenly sanctuary (9:24). The idea is further developed in those passages which echo the opening theme of the session at God's right hand (8:1; 10:12; 12:2).²

Peter

There is only one passage in the apostle's epistles which specifically refers to the ascension. 1 Peter 3:18-22 reads: "through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers subject to Him."³

¹The climax in the series of quotations in Heb 1 is reached in the quote in 1:13 from Ps 110, which centers on the exaltation theme. Without assuming the ascension and exaltation of Jesus, the writer would not have been so ready to apply this psalm to Him. For a detailed discussion of the use of Psalms in Heb 1, consult Homer A. Kent, Jr., The Epistle to the Hebrews (Winona Lake: BMH, 1972), pp. 34-37.

²William Milligan, The Ascension of Christ, pp. 84-86.

³Guthrie, NTT, p. 397. He finds a three-fold significance in the theme of 1 Pet 3:22. It is a declaration: (1) of the unending life and power of Christ; (2) of the withdrawal of His physical presence; and, (3) of His sovereignty.

Although the context raises difficulties in relation to Jesus preaching to the spirits in prison, His final status is not in doubt. Whatever the interpretation of this verse, it is clearly a witness to the belief in the ascension of Jesus.

Revelation

The entire book centers on the ascended Lord, and there can be no doubt from the frequent scenes set in heaven that the present activity of Christ plays an important role in John's thought.¹ The whole epistle alternates between earth and heaven, but it is the heavenly scene which is dominant. The final coming of Christ as Word of God in judgement is described as a coming from the opened heaven (19:11).

In the worship passage in Revelation 4 and 5, the Lamb stands before the throne (5:6), and shares with God in receiving the worship of all creatures (cf. 7:9). This idea is in full harmony with the other New Testament references to Christ being at the right hand of God. It is significant, however, that in 5:6 He is standing.²

Terms Used to Describe The Ascension

The classic passage on the ascension, and already discussed, is Acts 1:2-12, where four verbs are used to

¹Merrill C. Tenney, Interpreting Revelation (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957), p. 11.

²Guthrie, NTT, p. 398.

describe the various aspects of the ascension.

In verse 9, it is stated, "As they were looking, he was taken up." The Greek word for "taken up" is ἐπήρθε, from the root ἐπαίρω, and is commonly used to indicate something which is lifted up.¹

Again in verse 9, it is revealed that "a cloud received him out of their sight." The term used for "received up" is ὑπέλαβεν. As Blaiklock points out, it is found in the second aorist active indicative of ὑπολαμβάνω, meaning literally here, "took under him."²

A third verb, πορευμένου, is used in 1:10, translated "as he went." It was a common word meaning to pursue a journey,³ which would lead to the conclusion that the ascension of Christ was a voyage to heaven, as well as a departure from earth.

The final Greek word, found in 1:11, ἀνελημφθεῖς, is translated "received up" (cf. Mk 16:19 and Lk 24:51).⁴ This is, of course, a climactic concept, the resultant action springing from the preceding event. It is almost

¹Walter Bauer, William F. Arndt, and Wilbur F. Gingrich, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament, 2nd ed. rev. and augmented by F. Wilbur Gingrich and Frederick W. Danker (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1979), p. 281.

²Blaiklock, The Acts of the Apostles, p. 51.

³BAGD, pp. 698-99.

⁴Ibid., p. 56.

identical in meaning to ἐπήρθε in verse 9, and is employed later, in Acts 20:13-14, to describe being taken aboard a ship.¹

Combining the concept of these four verbs, the entire picture of the ascension is given. The first word, ἐπήρθε (1:9), in the passive form in which it is used, makes clear that the ascension is physically upward and that the Father is taking the Son to heaven. The second word, ὑπέλαβεν, indicates that once Christ was in the atmospheric heaven He was received by clouds. Some, like Walvoord, regard the cloud to be similar to that on the Mount of Transfiguration.² But there is no indication in the context that the cloud is other than a natural one. The third verb connotes that the ascension was a journey, an actual transmission from earth to heaven. The last word, ἀνελημφ-θεῖς, completes the picture by indicating that Christ was received into heaven as the destination of His journey.

Summary

It is certainly significant that nearly the entire New Testament is a witness to the ascension of Christ, whether directly, as in Luke 24:50-53 and Acts 1:2-12, or indirectly, as in Philippians 2:9-11. Every gospel record makes

¹Ibid.

²Walvoord, "The Ascension of Christ," p. 9.

some reference to it, as do the apostles Paul and Peter in their epistles. The books of Acts, Hebrews, and Revelation attribute their entire content and purpose to the ascension, with their respective emphases on the church, the priesthood and supremacy of Christ, and the promised second coming.

The original language of the New Testament depicts a close portrayal of the ascension event in the most detailed account, Acts 1:2-12. Four verbs describe the physical, upward movement of Jesus, from point of earthly departure to heavenly arrival, while forming theological statements concerning the Lord Christ as present beside the Father.

CHAPTER III

A DISCUSSION OF PROBLEMS

APPERTAINING TO THE ASCENSION OF CHRIST

While the New Testament gives a substantial witness to the ascension, there are attendant problems in the definition and significance of the event itself. There are three prominent problems, each of which will be stated and an attempt made to resolve them.

Number of Ascensions

On the morning of Christ's resurrection, Mary Magdalene became the first witness to that event. When she recognized who the gardener really was, her reaction was such that she began to cling to Jesus. It is because of this that Christ said, "Touch me not, for I am not yet ascended to my Father . . ." (John 20:17).

The original text of John 20:17 seems to indicate that Jesus did not prohibit Mary from touching Him, but from clinging. The imperative in the phrase, μή μου ἅπτου is present, not aorist, which would suggest that Jesus was telling Mary to stop what she was already doing. Jesus used ἅπτου, not with the meaning of a light superficial touch, but of a clinging, grasping touch.¹ Walvoord adds that:

¹Walvoord, "The Ascension," p. 6.

It is more probable that Christ rebuked Mary when she touched or clung to Him (Gr. hapto) because this was improper for her to do. By contrast, the women in Matthew 28:9 worshipped Him, bowing at His feet in a way that was in keeping with His person.¹

Christ added to His statement to Mary an explanation: "for I am not yet ascended unto the Father." The word ἀναβαίνω (ascend) is in the present tense, which allows for two interpretations: (1) that Jesus was about to ascend, even as He was speaking to Mary; or, (2) that "ascend" is a futuristic present.²

The first view is based on a belief that the ascension occurred on the day of the resurrection, between Christ's appearance to Mary and that to the disciples on the same evening. All the other appearances must then have taken place from heaven, to which Jesus returned after every appearance.³

J. A. Schep refutes this view:

The theory under discussion stretches the meaning of the present anabaino, "I am ascending," too far. It is obviously in conflict with the record of the ascension in Acts 1, which leaves no room for a plurality of ascensions but speaks of it as one unique event. We have seen that Luke 24 presents the same view.⁴

The second view, that of a futuristic use of the verb "ascend," is a legitimate grammatical interpretation in Greek

¹Ibid.

²J. A. Schep, The Nature of the Resurrection Body (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), p. 157.

³C. K. Barrett, The Gospel According to St. John (London: SPCK, 1955), p. 284.

⁴Schep, Resurrection Body, p. 157.

to denote what is to take place after a shorter or longer period of time. It is intended to alert the hearer of a future event so certain, that it appeared to be present.¹ This fits the situation. Christ wanted to startle Mary, causing her to cease clinging to Him and to set her mind on the task ahead by referring to His future ascension.

The advantage of this last view is that it is consistent with the ascension passages in Luke 24 and Acts 1, which present the event as a one-time occurrence. In addition, the futuristic present view dispels the notion of an ascension taking place on resurrection day.

Location of Heaven

Many modern critics of the ascension question whether heaven is to be regarded as a place, based on a Copernican theory of the universe. However, if Jesus disappeared from the earth in His ascent, He must have gone somewhere.

Scripture does not state where heaven is, but it does represent it as a definite place, not as "a state of blessedness . . . with God."² Heaven is said to be God's dwelling place (Ps 103:19-21; Isa 6:1; Heb 8:1; Rev 4:2), where He specially manifests His presence, and where He is

¹Walvoord, "The Ascension," p. 7.

²William Barclay, The Acts of the Apostles, in The Daily Bible Study Series, rev. ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1975), p. 56.

surrounded by angelic beings and the spirits of the just. In Acts 3:21, Peter says that "the heaven must receive (Jesus) until the restoration of all things."

In addition to the allusion of the above passage, there are many specific references where Christ is seen in heaven.¹ The Scriptural evidence overwhelmingly affirms Jesus' ascension into heaven, which the modern mind rejects only because it denies the authority of its source in God.

Location of Christ

One of the theological problems which arises in the doctrine of the ascension is the question of its relation to the omnipresence of Jesus Christ. The Lutheran church, following the teachings of Martin Luther, has generally maintained the doctrine that the body of Christ is omnipresent only in His deity and is local as far as His body is concerned. Protestantism is nearly divided equally concerning this controversy.

A contemporary Lutheran proponent is David P. Scaer, who writes:

The early church never understood the ascension of Jesus as a departure ceremony for a beloved teacher traveling to a distant and unknown land. Rather, it was seen as a

¹The passages are so numerous any other interpretation seems to be without foundation (Acts 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; 1 Thes 1:10; 4:16; 1 Tim 3:16; Heb 1:3, 13; 2:7; 4:14; 6:20; 7:26; 8:1; 9:24; 10:12-13; 12:2; 1 John 2:1; Rev 1:7, 13-18; 5:5-12; 6:9-17; 7:9-17; 14:1-5; 19:11-16.

further step in his glorification, from which the church could only benefit. Luke, the only New Testament writer to give us a graphic account of the Ascension, also points out that after the event Christ was working with his apostles (Acts 14:3). For Luke, the Ascension did not mean that Jesus was no longer with them. Describing it, he gives no indication that the disciples were in any way saddened or disappointed. On the contrary, they were elated and glorified God. The Ascension did not only mean that Jesus had entered a new dimension, It also meant that through it they were going to participate in Christ's universal reign through their preaching of the gospel. What God had been doing through Jesus in calling men to repentance he was now going to do through them. . . .

The full significance of the Ascension is lost if it is simply viewed as a spatial event with Jesus going from one place to another.¹

Such a position spiritualizes the body of Christ, deifying it, thus delimiting Jesus' humanity and His ministry as our high priest. It was in His physical body that the Lord was born, lived, died, was raised, and ascended. If Jesus' body went from the "here" to the "everywhere," then the significance of the ascension for the salvation of the elect is lost.

The arguments in favor of the locality of the humanity of Christ are stated well by Charles Hodge, who points out that locality is an essential attribute of any body, but an omnipresent body loses the characteristics of a body.² For this reason, Christ is presented in Scripture as bodily present in heaven now, even though He is spiritually present

¹Scaer, "Jesus Did Not Leave--He Reigns Through Us," p. 24.

²Charles Hodge, Systematic Theology, 3 vols. (Reprinted ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 2:630-34.

everywhere.¹ The locality of the body of Christ is essential not only to His present ministry on the throne in heaven,² but also to His second coming to earth in glory as a bodily return, and His bodily presence in the millenium.³

Summary

The ascension of Christ, like any other doctrine in Scripture, carries with it problems which can hinder its understanding if not handled correctly. One of these attending problems involves the possibility of two ascensions, suggested by John 20:17. While Christ may use the present tense to inform Mary of His ascent, it is futuristic in thrust, indicating an ascension in the near-future. This idea is consistent with Luke 24 and Acts 1 in presenting a one-time ascension event, and also precludes an ascension occurring on resurrection day.

The locale of heaven, the destination of Jesus' upward ascent, is for the most part a problem with liberals. The Scriptures, taken as divinely authoritative, declare

¹Ibid.

²Schep, Resurrection Body, p. 165, elaborates: "It enabled him to do his high-priestly work in behalf of his Church in the heavenly sanctuary (Rom 8:34; Heb 7:24, 25; 9:11, 24-26). It placed at his disposal the Spirit with all his comforting, sanctifying, enlightening powers and gifts, the Spirit through whom he as the Head has communion with the Church as his body, making her God's temple (John 14:16; 16:7; Acts 2:33; 1 Cor 12, etc.)."

³Walvoord, "The Ascension," p. 4.

heaven to be an actual place where God specially manifests His presence. In addition, the New Testament repeatedly declares Jesus as being present in heaven, demonstrating that He disappeared from earth and appeared in heaven.

Finally, the question of how Christ can be bodily located, yet be omnipresent as God, is answered as being a mystery somehow associated with His resurrection. Yet it must be stressed that the Son of God is still human, and nothing in either the resurrection, ascension, or session has detracted from that reality.

CHAPTER IV

A THEOLOGICAL INTERPRETATION
OF THE ASCENSION OF CHRIST

Four great events in the life of Christ help to form the mainstay of the Christian faith. These are the incarnation, the resurrection of Christ, His ascension into heaven, and His second advent. All these events are matters of faith, based upon the substantial testimony of the Scriptures,¹ and each must be accepted and believed.

As has been established, the ascension of the Lord is of more than passing importance. An interpretation of all its aspects and implications, based on Scripture, will aid in a greater appreciation of this necessary doctrine in Christology, as well as living out in the flesh all that God intends for believers in Christ.

The Reasons For Delaying The Ascension

First, Jesus waited for forty days before ascending into heaven to prove beyond doubt that He had risen from the dead.² Had He ascended immediately it might have given rise to the conclusion that He had not risen, but that His body

¹1 Cor 15:3-7.

²Lk 24:34.

had disappeared.¹ During the forty days He was seen by numerous people and on different occasions. Through His post-resurrection appearances He gave substance and validity to the truth of the Scriptures, and silenced His skeptics.²

Second, Christ postponed His ascension in order to instruct the disciples for their great work in proclaiming the Christian faith. Luke states that "beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he explained to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself."³ By the time the Holy Spirit came to endue the disciples with power they were already acquainted with the basic doctrines of the revelation of God, and were able to witness concerning the faith.

Third, Jesus delayed His ascension in order to prevent corrupt influences from subverting the disciples' faith in the Scriptures. He told His followers that the Holy Spirit would "teach you all things, and remind you of all I have said to you."⁴ The additional days spent with them made it possible for Him to complete His instructions, and to prepare the way for the coming of the Holy Spirit.

¹Matt 27:62-66.

²1 Cor 15:3-7.

³Lk 24:27.

⁴John 14:26.

The Necessity Of The Ascension

It was necessary for Christ to ascend, first, because heaven was the place from which He came. The Lord had identified heaven as His home,¹ and a place where He would prepare other ones. He went back, having prophesied, "I go my way, and you will seek me, and die in your sins; where I am going you cannot come . . . You are from below; I am from above; You are of this world; I am not of this world."²

Second, Jesus' prophetic statement that He would ascend into heaven had to be fulfilled. "You have heard how I said to you, 'I go away, and come again to you.' If you loved me, you would be glad, because I said, 'I go to the Father.'"³

Third, Jesus had to ascend in order for the promised Holy Spirit to come: "Nevertheless I tell you the truth, it is expedient for you that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Comforter will not come unto you. But if I depart, I will send Him unto you."⁴

Fourth, the ascension was necessary in order to install Jesus as the high priest before God. Obviously this

¹John 8:14.

²John 8:21, 33.

³John 14:28.

⁴John 16:7.

could not be accomplished until He ascended. But now at God's right hand Christ is both sin-bearer and mediator:

We have such an high priest, who is set on the right hand of the throne of the majesty in the heavens; a minister of the sanctuary, and of the true tabernacle, which the Lord set, and not man.¹

The Nature Of The Ascension

First, the One who ascended is the God-man. The whole person ascended, not just the divine son or the human man. He went up to heaven in a resurrected body, but in a human body that was raised incorruptible. He can never relinquish His humanity, since He is forever God and man.²

Second, the ascension was a real departure from this earth and an actual entrance into heaven. Jesus passed from the visible world into the invisible, to the everlasting realm. "This same Jesus, who is taken from you up into heaven, shall come in a manner as you have seen Him go into heaven."³

Third, the ascension was visible and public, not secret. It was witnessed by many and was accomplished in their presence.⁴ The transfer of Christ's body from earth to heaven is accepted through the testimony of Scripture,

¹Heb 8:1, 2.

²1 Cor 15:20.

³Acts 1:11.

⁴Matt 28:16, 17.

recorded by eye-witnesses.¹ A similarity obtains between Christ's ascension and His second advent. He went away personally, visibly, and in great power. He will come again in the same manner He was seen going up to heaven.²

The Results Of The Ascension

First, the ascension resulted in the completion of the resurrection.³ Whereas the resurrection concerns the overcoming of death, the ascension concerns the exaltation of Jesus to His present status in heaven.⁴

Second, having ascended, the Lord is now at the Father's right hand. This is a position of power and privilege. "Which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion . . . and has put all things under his feet, and gave him to be head over all things to the church."⁵ It is also a position of glory.⁶

Third, it is the beginning of exaltation and worship. "Wherefore God has highly exalted Him, and given Him

¹1 John 1:1-3.

²Acts 1:11.

³Eph 4:8; 1 Pet 3:19, 22.

⁴Heb 1:2-4.

⁵Eph 1:20-23.

⁶Lk 24:26.

a name which is above every name: that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth."¹ The power of Jesus extends to earth as well as heaven. Christ is Lord of all, and is over all.

Fourth, the ascension fulfilled the divine mission. The purpose of Jesus on earth which began at the incarnation ended with His ascension. The incarnation is God becoming man, and the ascension is the God-man returning to the Father.

Fifth, the bestowal of the Holy Spirit resulted from the ascension, even as Jesus promised.²

Sixth, having ascended up on high, Christ is the head of His body, the church.³

Seventh, there is the access to the Father for all believers. Christ is declared to be the firstfruits of those who are asleep.⁴ As such He implicates all believers in His resurrection and ascension. As He gained access to the Father, so he gained the same for all who are united in Him.⁵

¹Phil 2:9, 10.

²Eph 4:8.

³Eph 1:22, 23; Col 1:18.

⁴1 Cor 15:20.

⁵1 John 2:1, 2.

Eighth, Christ intercedes in heaven for the saints. "It is Christ who died, indeed, is risen again, making intercession for us."¹ At this moment Christ is praying for His own and pleading with God on their behalf. This should be a source of profound joy and continuing encouragement to those who are in Christ Jesus.

Ninth, the ascension marked the beginning of a new age, and the promise of one that would follow it. The link which connects these ages is the angelic announcement, where the ascension is the promise of Christ's second coming.²

Summary

Since it has been established that much of the New Testament rests on the ascension of Christ, a theological interpretation of the doctrine, based on the Scriptures, can be substantially delineated. This aids not only in a greater appreciation of the necessary role of the ascension in Christology, but also in the practical matters of life for the believer in Christ.

The reasons Jesus delayed His ascension are several. First, He wanted to demonstrate that He was indeed risen from the dead. Second, Christ prepared His disciples for their work in proclaiming the Christian faith. The third, and closely related to the second, Jesus postponed the ascension to maintain the disciples' faith, and to prepare

¹Rom 8:34.

²Acts 1:11.

the way for the coming of the Holy Spirit.

The ascension was a necessity, first, because heaven was the place from which Jesus came. He returned there to prepare it as a home for those who would believe on Him. Also, the ascension had to occur in order to fulfill prophecy, and Jesus' departure meant that the Holy Spirit would come. Finally, the ascension was necessary in order that Jesus could assume His role as the high priest, which is unique in that He is both sin-bearer and mediator.

The nature of the ascension is the theological center of the doctrine. The event was a real, physical departure of Jesus from earth, and an actual entrance into heaven. The occurrence was visible and public, accomplished before many eye-witnesses. The One who ascended is the God-man, the whole person, both the divine son and the human man. Also to be noted is the similarity between Christ's ascension and His second coming. He will return in the same manner He was seen going up to heaven.

The final area of theological consideration is the results of the ascension. These include the completion of the resurrection and thus the exaltation of Jesus, and the position of Jesus as Lord of all at the right hand of the Father, where He is ruling as the head of the church. An additional result, and related to the ones mentioned, is the worship which Christ now receives because He has obtained our salvation, and because He is the risen Son of God in great

power and glory. Other results of Christ's ascension are the completion of Jesus' divine mission on earth, the sending of the promised Holy Spirit, the access to the Father for all believers through Christ, the beginning of Jesus' high-priestly ministry, the commencement of the church age, and the promise of an age to come. In fulfillment of the promise given by the angels, Christ will return personally to establish His reign on the earth.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to examine the doctrine of the ascension, historically, biblically, and theologically, in an attempt to present a fresh document on this vital, but neglected teaching in Christology.

In the apostolic church, the ascension was a clear and crucial doctrine in both teaching and practice. The post-apostolic fathers perpetuated a creedal representation of the apostolic witness to the ascension, despite the lack of a complete New Testament canon. While there may have been disagreement over the interpretation of the ascension, nearly all held firmly to its historicity and its place as an article of faith. As persecution and heresies prevailed, the church purified its teaching of divine truth, so that by the Council of Nicea in A.D. 325, Christology was growing into a mature system of biblical truth. The ascension found its clearest, orthodox expression in the writings of Ambrose and Augustine.

During the medieval period of the church, the ascension suffered a long malaise, due to suspicion of original thinking in the universities and the traditionalism of Rome in doctrinal studies. Yet it was that same spirit which preserved the teachings of the ancient church, so that the

ascension remained in the stream of dogma. In the Reformation, interest in the ascension revived, as seen in the works of Luther and Calvin. The latter reformer cast the ascension into a systematic evangelical mold which is still revered today.

As the church moved into modern times, the rationalistic worldview of the Enlightenment overshadowed biblical truth as a value standard and measure of reality. As this stream of thought entered more deeply into the church, biblical doctrines became the object of criticism, if not ridicule. By the end of the nineteenth century, the ascension had been reduced to a pre-Copernican myth, unscientific and non-historical. Only the providential work of God, in the lives of such scholars as William Milligan and Henry Swete, caused the ascension to be preserved as biblically true for Christians in the church today.

The New Testament witness to the ascension is a complete one, since much of its teaching assumes the doctrine. In two passages, Luke 24:50-53 and Acts 1:2-12, the ascension is presented directly, and in significant historical detail. As a result, much of the grammatical construction is useful in formulating Christological doctrine. It is the detailed discussion of the ascension which enables the interpreter to deal with its attendant problems, while retaining the authority and inerrancy of Scripture.

Since so much of the New Testament rests on the ascension of Christ, as well as His birth, resurrection, and second coming, a theological interpretation of the doctrine is quickly delineated. The purpose, necessity, nature, and results of the ascension find their expression in the exalted Christ, to whom every knee will bow and every tongue confess Him to be the Lord of all.

While the writer acknowledges much to this study, it is hoped that the reader may be stimulated to further pursuit of the doctrine.

APPENDIX A

A TABLE OF BIBLICAL REFERENCES ON THE ASCENSION

Psalm 68:18	Ephesians 6:9
Psalm 110:1	Philippians 2:9-11
Isaiah 52:13	Colossians 3:1-4
Mark 16:19	1 Timothy 3:16
Luke 24:50-53	Hebrews 1:3, 13
John 3:31	Hebrews 2:7-9
John 6:61-62	Hebrews 4:14
John 8:21-28	Hebrews 6:19-20
Acts 1:2-12	Hebrews 7:26
Acts 2:31-36	Hebrews 8:1
Acts 5:30-31	Hebrews 9:11-12, 24
Acts 7:55	Hebrews 10:11-13
Acts 9:3, 17	Hebrews 12:1-2
Romans 8:34	1 Peter 1:21
1 Corinthians 15:3-7	1 Peter 3:22
Ephesians 1:19-20	1 John 2:1-2
Ephesians 2:6	Revelation 3:21
Ephesians 4:7-10	Revelation 14:14

APPENDIX B

PARALLELS BETWEEN MARK 16:9-20

AND LUKE 24

Mark 16	Luke 24
9. Christ appears to Mary Magdalene from whom He had cast out seven devils	10. Mary Magdalene is among those to whom the angels make known the Resurrection (cp. Luke 8:2)
11. Her report is disbelieved	11. Their report is disbelieved
12, 13. Jesus appears unto two of them as they go into the country--they return and inform the others	13-35. Jesus appears unto two of them as they go into a village--they return and inform the eleven
14. Jesus appears to the eleven as they eat He condemns their unbelief	36, 41. Jesus appears to the eleven as they eat 37-43. He condemns their unbelief
15. He charges them to preach the gospel to the whole creation	47b. He charges them to preach in His name to all the nations
16. He that believes and is baptized shall be saved	47a. Repentance and remission of sins shall be preached (cp. Acts 5:15) (cp. Acts 2:4) (cp. Acts 28:3-5) (cp. Acts 28:8)
17. Devils shall be cast out Glossolalia	
18. Serpents shall be held	

Hands shall be laid on the
sick

19. Jesus was received up into
heaven

51. He parted from them
and was carried up
into heaven

APPENDIX C

PARALLELS BETWEEN LUKE 24:50-53

AND ACTS 1:9-14

Luke 24	Acts 1
50. And he led them out as far as to Bethany; and he lifted up his hands, and blessed them	12. Then returned they unto Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is from Jerusalem a sabbath day's journey
51. And it came to pass, while he blessed them, he was parted from them, and carried up into heaven	9. And, when he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up, and a cloud received him out of their sight.
52. And they worshipped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy	12. Then returned they unto Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is from Jerusalem a sabbath day's journey
53. And were continually in the temple, praising and blessing God. Amen	

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Aland, Kurt; Black, Matthew; Martini, Carlo M.; Metzger, Bruce M.; and Wikgren, Allen, editors. The Greek Testament. Third edition. New York: American Bible Society, 1975.
- Althaus, Paul. The Theology of Martin Luther. Translated by Robert C. Schultz. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975.
- Ambrose. The Writings of Ambrose. In The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers. Edited by Philip Schaff. Reprint edition in 38 vols. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979.
- Augustine. The Writings of Saint Augustine. In The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers. Edited by Philip Schaff. Reprint edition in 38 vols. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979.
- Baille, D. M. God Was in Christ. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1948.
- Barclay, William. The Acts of the Apostles. In The Daily Bible Study Series. Rev. ed. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1975.
- Barrett, C. K. The Gospel According to St. John. London: SPCK, 1955.
- Bauer, Walter; Arndt, William F.; and Gingrich, F. Wilbur. A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature. 2nd ed. revised and augmented by F. Wilbur Gingrich and Frederick W. Danker. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1979.
- Berkouwer, Gerrit C. The Work of Christ. In the Studies in Dogmatic Series. Translated by Cornelius Lambregtse. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965.
- Benoit, Pierre. "The Ascension of Christ." Theological Digest 8 (February 1960):105-10.
- Blaiklock, E. M. The Acts of the Apostles. In the Tyndale Bible Commentaries. General ed., R. V. G. Tasker. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959.

- Blass, F., and Debrunner, A. A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature. Trans. and rev. of 9th-10th German edition by Robert W. Funk. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1961.
- Bruce, F. F. Commentary On the Book Of the Acts. In The New International Commentary On The New Testament. Edited by F. F. Bruce. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1954.
- Bultmann, Rudolf. Theology of the New Testament. 2 vols. Translated by Reginald H. Fuller. London: SCM, 1965.
- Calvin, John. Institutes of the Christian Religion. In vol. 20 of The Library of Christian Classics. 26 vols., edited by John T. McNeill. Trans. and indexed by Ford L. Battles. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960.
- Chrysostom. The Writings of Saint Chrysostom. In The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers. Edited by Philip Schaff. Reprint edition in 38 vols. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979.
- Cross, Frank L., ed. Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church. 2nd ed. London: Oxford University Press, 1974.
- Cullman, Oscar. The Christology of the New Testament. London: Oxford University Press, 1959.
- Dana, H. E. and Mantey, Julius R. A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament. Toronto: Macmillan, 1955.
- Davis, J. G. He Ascended Into Heaven. London: Lutterworth, 1958.
- Eusebius. The Basic Writings of Eusebius. In The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers. Edited by Philip Schaff. Reprint edition in 38 vols. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979.
- Franklin, Eric. Christ The Lord: A Study in the Purpose and Theology of Luke-Acts. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1975.
- Guthrie, Donald. New Testament Theology. Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1981.
- Harnack, Adolf. The Expansion of Christianity. English trans. London: Williams and Norgate, 1958.

- Henry, Carl F. H., ed. Jesus of Nazareth: Saviour and Lord. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1966.
- Hodge, Charles. Systematic Theology. 3 vols. Reprinted edition. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979.
- Ignatius. The Writings of Ignatius. In The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers. Edited by Philip Schaff. Reprint edition in 38 vols. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979.
- Irenaeus. The Writings of Irenaeus. In The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers. Edited by Philip Schaff. Reprint edition in 38 vols. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979.
- Justin Martyr. The Writings of Justin Martyr. In The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers. Edited by Philip Schaff. Reprint edition in 38 vols. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979.
- Kaylor, Robert D. "The Ascension Motif in Luke-Acts, the Epistle to the Hebrews, and the Fourth Gospel." (Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina, 1964).
- Kent, Homer A. Jerusalem to Rome. Winona Lake, IN: BMH, 1972.
- _____. The Epistle to the Hebrews. Winona Lake: BMH, 1972.
- Ladd, George Eldon. A Theology of the New Testament. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974.
- Latourette, Kenneth Scott. A History of Christianity. 2 vols. New York: Harper and Row, 1975.
- Layman, Lewis R. "'Touch Me Not': A Critical Investigation of John 20:17." Unpublished critical monograph, Grace Theological Seminary, 1948.
- Luther, Martin. Luther's Works. 54 vols. Edited by Jaroslav Pelikan. St. Louis: Concordia, 1955-68.
- McDonald, H. Dermot. Jesus--Human and Divine. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1968.
- McGiffert, Arthur C. A History of Christian Thought. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1946.
- Metzger, Bruce M., editor. A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament. London and New York: United Bible Societies, 1971.

- _____. "The Meaning of Christ's Ascension." Christianity Today 10 (May 27, 1966):863-64.
- Milligan, William. The Ascension of Christ. London: Macmillan, 1891.
- Moule, C. F. D. "The Ascension--Acts 1:9." Expository Times 68 (July 1957):205-9.
- Moulton, W. F. and Geden, A. S. A Concordance to the Greek Testament. 5th edition revised by H. K. Moulton. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1978.
- Origen. The Writings of Origen. In The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers. Edited by Philip Schaff. Reprint edition in 38 vols. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979.
- Scaer, David P. "Jesus Did Not Leave--He Reigns Through Us." Christianity Today 26 (May 21, 1982):24-25.
- Schep, J. A. The Nature of the Resurrection Body. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964.
- Stalker, James. The Christology of Jesus. London: Macmillan, 1899.
- _____. The Life of Jesus Christ. Rev. edition. New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1891.
- Swete, Henry Barclay. The Ascended Christ. London: Macmillan, 1910.
- Tertullian. The Writings of Tertullian. In The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers. Edited by Philip Schaff. Reprint edition in 38 vols. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979.
- Thiessen, Henry C. Introductory Lectures in Systematic Theology. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1949.
- Thomas Aquinas. Summa Theologica. 3 vols. London: Burns and Oates, 1947.
- van Stempvoort, P. A. "The Interpretation of the Ascension in Luke and Acts." New Testament Studies 5 (October 1958):30-42.
- Walvoord, John F. "The Ascension of Christ." Bibliotheca Sacra 121 (January-March 1964):3-12.
- Warfield, Benjamin B. The Person and Work of Christ. Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1950.

