

Christ's Ascension

Pastor Kelly Sensenig

Some Christians celebrate the ascension of Christ 40 days after His resurrection based upon Acts 1:3-4 while others celebrate the ascension of Christ in connection with His resurrection. This is because Christ's ascension was inseparably linked with the resurrection of Christ (Eph. 1:20; 2:5-6; Col. 2:12; 3:1). The one presupposes the other. This is because both the resurrection and ascension of Christ work together to bring about all the spiritual blessings that God wants to give to His people, blessings that relate to our position in Heaven, our practice on earth, and our prophetic destiny.

I. What are the purposes of Christ's ascension?

There are six purposes related to Christ's ascension.

- ✚ Christ ascended to carry out the role of High Priest and Advocate (Rom. 5:10; 8:34; Rom. 4:25; Heb. 7:25; 9:24; 1 John 2:2).

Christ arose from the dead and ascended back to the Father confirming that His work was finished. Today Christ "ever liveth (in Heaven) to make intercession for us" (Heb. 7:25), as believers in Christ, since He has risen from the dead and the Father has accepted His substitutionary sacrifice on our behalf.

The ascension of Christ is inseparably linked to the resurrection of Christ. Jesus Christ arose from the dead to ascend back to the Father and represent us in Heaven as our Savior (Rom. 8:34).

The death of Christ is the ground of our justification (Rom. 5:9) but the resurrection of Christ with His ascension into Heaven is the proof of our justification before God (Rom. 4:25). The resurrection in conjunction with the ascension of Christ into Heaven proves the Father has accepted the sacrifice of His Son as sufficient payment for our sins (John 19:30). Christ's risen and ascended presence in Heaven confirms the Father's wrath is satisfied against us and our sins, while He represents us before God as our High Priest, who has provided complete forgiveness of sins, rendered us righteous in God's presence, and given us eternal salvation based upon His finished sacrifice.

The death of Christ is the SOURCE of our justification before God (Rom. 5:9 – “justified by his blood”) but the resurrection and ascension of Christ is the SECURITY of our justification before God (Rom. 4:25). Christ’s death has the power to save us (Rom. 5:9) and His risen life at God’s right hand has the power to keep us (Rom. 5:10).

The Father looks at the WOUNDS of Jesus as the means of our salvation and not our WORKS, as Christ sits on the right hand of the Father in Heaven.

Hebrews 9:24

“For Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands (earthly tabernacle with its holy of holies), *which are* the figures of the true (the true tabernacle which is represented in Christ’s priestly work on our behalf); but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us” (to be our High Priest, representing us as forgiven, freed from condemnation forever, and justified in the presence of God).

1 John 2:1

“My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.”

Jesus ascended to Heaven to become our advocate or lawyer. We have a good lawyer if we are a Christian. Our lawyer in Heaven is Jesus Christ, who pleads the value of His sacrifice to the Father as sufficient to save our soul, give us justification in God’s presence, grant us total acquittal of our sins, and therefore restore our fellowship with God when we sin in the Christian life.

If we confess our sins (1 John 1:9) before God in our Christian life, we can know that He will forgive us our sins, based upon the advocacy or defensive work of Jesus Christ in Heaven. Jesus pleads our case in Heaven (before the Father) that He paid the judgment for all of our sins and it’s on this basis that we can be forgiven of our sins in our Christian life and have our fellowship restored with God (not our salvation).

Remember that we do not confess our sins to regain our SALVATION before God but to regain our FELLOWSHIP with God. Our forgiveness in the Christian life relates to restored fellowship with God – not a restored salvation. This is because

confession of sin does not result in salvation but only the expression of our belief in Jesus Christ results in salvation (Acts 16:31). Therefore, when we sin in our Christian life, our fellowship with God is broken and it's our communion with God that needs to be restored (not our salvation). This fellowship is restored when our advocate (Jesus Christ) pleads before the Father our justification, forgiveness, and salvation and it's on this basis, our fellowship or communion can be restored to God.

Take Away:

- If Jesus ascended back to Heaven in order to represent us before God's throne, on behalf of His blood sacrifice, isn't that good enough to both secure and maintain our salvation?
- Are we trusting in our good works or the ascended Lord Jesus and His High Priestly ministry in Heaven on our behalf?
- Are you trusting in Christ alone for your salvation?

✚ Christ's ascended to provide His saints with spiritual blessings (Eph. 1:3; 2:5-6).

Every spiritual blessing that we have is based on Christ's ascension. The prepositional phrase "in Christ" (Eph. 1:3) speaks of our spiritual position and union with Jesus Christ in Heaven (where the ascended Christ lives) and all the spiritual blessings that flow from this position and relationship that we share with Christ in Heaven.

The repeated phrase "in heavenly places" (celestial regions or realms) describes the specific location where Christ is today (the third Heaven – Eph. 1:21) and from where all of our spiritual blessings originate, which is from the life of the risen and ascended Christ in Glory!

The term "heavenlies" in a general sense refers to the physical location of Christ but the term celestial (denoting the unseen world of spiritual reality) also refers more specifically to a spiritual location for the believer in Christ and the blessings they receive on a spiritual level and existence instead of a physical level or earthly existence.

The moment a person is placed in Christ (and possesses this new position and relationship with Christ in the heavenly realm), he becomes the possessor of all the spiritual blessings that God has chosen to give him. Spiritual blessings are benefits that relate to our spiritual life in contrast to our physical life. These are the blessings that we receive from the resurrected and ascended Lord. There is no other way to receive them.

Chafer writes:

“To be in Christ, which is the portion of all who are saved, is to partake of all that Christ has done, all that He is, and all that He ever will be.”

In Heavenly Places In Christ

Denotes our POSITION (Where Christ is, we are)
Defines our PRIVILEGES (What Christ is, we are)
Describes our POSSESSIONS (What Christ has, we have)
Dispenses our spiritual PROSPERITY (What Christ has done for us, we claim)
Determines our PRACTICE (What Christ does, we do)

- **Position** = In Heaven at the Father’s right hand - so are we!
- **Privileges** = Christ is perfectly righteous, holy, faultless, and without sin before the Father - so are we! Christ has acceptance before the Father, He is eternally beloved, sanctified, perfect, and without condemnation - so are we!
- **Possessions** = Christ is heir to everything and we are heirs and joint-heirs with Christ of everything that He possesses (Rom. 8:17; 1 Pet. 1:3-4).

- **Prosperity** = All the spiritual blessings related to salvation, justification, regeneration, righteousness, redemption, victory, and sanctification which come from Christ - we must claim! Practice = Christ's heavenly holiness and righteousness should be experienced by us ("seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God" - Col. 3:1). We should practice our heavenly relationship and union with Christ and manifest His character in our daily lives.

Seated in heavenly places in Christ! This means that in some fantastic and amazing way, we share in Christ's resurrected, ascended and victorious life in Heaven. This means that every spiritual blessing that we have is based on Christ's ascension. Living with Christ in the heavenlies (experiencing our position and union with Him) means we are sharing His life and receiving the spiritual blessings He gives to us. This ultimately means that we can live victoriously, spiritually, contently, and completely for Him.

"I'm in the heavenlies in Christ,
I'm in the heavenlies in Christ,
The place of power and prayer
In Christ I'm seated there,
I'm in the heavenlies in Christ."

Yes, we share Christ's life in Heaven!

- This means that everything that Christ has DONE for us in regard to the blessings related to salvation is ours to claim (providing us with salvation, forgiveness, justification, righteousness, and new birth) is ours. We receive all of the blessings related to salvation because the Father sees us in Heaven, sharing the life of His Son, and receiving all the benefits He has provided for us.
- This means that everything that Christ is DOING for us today in regard to the daily blessings related to the Christian life (providing us with sanctification, victory, peace, joy, strength) is dispensed to us on a daily basis. Because of our union with Christ in the heavenlies, we can be sure that we can share in the spiritual blessings related to the Christian life. We

will not come up short with the power and presence that we need from the risen and ascended life of Christ!

Ephesians 1:19-22 talks about our spiritual and heavenly position in Christ and the spiritual blessings we share with Him. In this section of Scripture our victory over the enemy is emphasized.

Ephesians 1:19-22 victoriously declares:

“And what *is* the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power, 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 every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come: And hath put all *things* under his feet, and gave him *to be* the head over all *things* to the church.”

We not only need to keep looking up (for His return) we also need to keep looking down (from our lofty position of victory in Christ in the heavenlies).

The key is to KNOW about our heavenly position in Christ (where we are given all these spiritual blessings through sharing His life) and then by faith APPLY this position in Christ to our life down here, so we are daily experiencing our spiritual blessings and privileges that we have with Christ in the heavenlies.

Someone said:

“Our heart is in the heavenlies but our feet are on the earth.”

God has a deposit of resources for our use, in His Bank of Heaven, or in the heavenlies in Christ, where we are sharing His life. And this great resource is sufficient for our every need, it is available at any time, and from any place we might be. From our position in Christ (as we share His life) we can always draw on Christ’s resources. All the spiritual resources we need for life are available to us but we must take possession of them by faith and appropriate them into our lives.
2 Peter 1:3-4

“According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that *pertain* unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and

virtue: Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.”

There is a true story about William Randolph Hearst the late newspaper publisher. Hearst invested a fortune in collecting great works of art. One day he read about some valuable pieces of art and decided that he must add them to his collection. He sent his agent abroad to locate and purchase them. Months went by before the agent returned and reported to Hearst that the items had at last been found—they were already stored in his own warehouse. Hearst had purchased them years before! He never knew that he possessed the rich paintings!

Take Away:

- Have we fully understood about our position in Christ in Heaven?
- Have we been practicing our position in Christ?
- Have we been claiming our spiritual riches and privileges that Christ gives to us because of our position in Him?
- Have we been relying on the victorious Lord for daily sanctification?

✚ Christ ascended to govern and gift the Church (Ephesians 4:8-12).

The points of these verses is that Jesus Christ ascended back to Heaven with the promise of becoming the Head of the Church and also sending gifted people to His newly formed Church at Pentecost (Acts 2). Ephesians 4:8-12 is a general paraphrase of Psalm 68:18. Paul, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, is making application of what was said in Psalm 68:18 to Christ’s entrance into Heaven to begin His New Testament Church. This text might be viewed as a blast from the past! Paul is looking back at what Christ did for His people who were bound in the inner chamber of the earth.

“Wherefore he saith, When he ascended up on high (the ascension of Christ), he led captivity captive (Jesus led the captured ones in a victory parade of captives who were once held by Satan in the inner regions of the earth), and gave gifts unto men (these gifts refer to gifted men that the ascended Christ would give to the Church). (Now that he ascended, what is it but that he also descended first into the lower parts of the earth? He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things.) And he gave

some, apostles; and some, prophets (to jumpstart the church and build its foundation – these gifts were temporary); and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers (to continue to minister to the church – these gifts are permanent); For the perfecting of the saints (spiritual maturity and growth), for the work of the ministry (effective service), for the edifying of the body of Christ” (building them up in their Christian faith and spiritual life).

D. L. Moody said:

“It is better to put ten men to work than to do the work of ten men.”

This has been a difficult passage for many to understand and interpret. It seems obscure to many. However, the central thought in verses 8–10 is that the Giver of the gifts is the ascended Christ. By His ascended victory He gained the right to rule His church and to give gifts to His church. There were no gifts given to the Church before He went back to Heaven. This means that the New Testament Church did NOT exist in the Old Testament; for if it did, it would be a Church without gifts. It would also be without Head, which is Christ, who ascended to Heaven.

Now let’s think about this oft misunderstood phrase. What does the Bible mean when it states that “he led captivity captive” or led captured ones in their captivity? The early church fathers saw in it the work of Christ in bringing the Old Testament saints out of paradise up to the throne of God. I think they were right on this. The picture behind this phrase (“he led captivity captive”) refers to the victory parade of a general who displays his captives and spoils of war before others.

This verse reminds us that Christ descended into the lower parts of the earth between His death and resurrection (Matt. 12:40) so that He could bring the saved spirits of the Old Testament saints back to Heaven with Him, who were held captive in Hades (the center of the earth).

When Christ ascended, His saints, who were in one sense held captive or bound by Satan’s authority in the inner chamber of the earth, also ascended to Heaven with Christ, who was their great Victor.

As already mentioned, the picture here is of a military conqueror leading his captives and sharing this victory with others. Only in this case, the “captives” (those captured) are not Christ’s enemies, but His own children (Old Testament

saints), who were in some sense held captive by Satan within the realm of the inner earth which was referred to as “Abraham’s bosom” (Luke 16:22–23) and “Paradise” (Luke 23:43). The sense of this phrase

With Christ’s victory over death through His resurrection, which resulted in Him reclaiming “the keys of death and hades” (Rev. 1:18), He was able to empty out this inner chamber in the center of the earth, where God’s Old Testament believers were bound. Therefore, when Christ ascended to Heaven, He led a great company of His saints to Heaven with Him.

Imagine the joy as the Son of God told these Old Testament saints that they were now free and would forever be with Him in Heaven. With the price of redemption for man’s sins paid on the cross, through the shedding of Christ’s blood, the captivated spirits of the righteous were now able to leave the inner Paradise and go into the presence of God in Heaven.

Here is what we need to understand. Paul in passing mentions what Christ did for the Old Testament saints when ascending to Heaven. However, his point is not to elaborate on what Christ did in bringing His Old Testament saints out of the inner earth. His point is that in bringing these captives out of the realm of Hades, on His way out of the realm of death, Christ exalted Himself in glory, to bring about the formation of His Church and the gifting of this same church.

We learn several things from all of this.

- a. Christ gifts the Church as a result of His ascension.

The gifts given to the Church mentioned in the context of Christ’s ascension, and as a result of His ascension (Eph. 4:11), would be gifted men who would jumpstart the church (apostles and prophets) and a continuing group of gifted men (evangelists and pastor/teachers) who would continue to minister to the church.

The ascension of Christ is accompanied with the promise of Christ’s sending gifted speakers, with their appropriate gifts, to replace His ministry of speaking while He was living on earth. These gifted speakers would begin the Church and continue to nurture the Church throughout the Church Age. Pastor and teachers are the result of Christ’s ascension promise. They are here today because of Christ’s ascension.

Take Away:

- Have we been following our ascended and victorious Leader, Jesus Christ, who is the Head of the Church?
- Is Jesus in charge of our life, our ambitions, and our will?
- Have we been grateful for the pastors and teachers God has brought into our life as a result of the ascension?
- Have we reflected on all those who were influential upon our lives?
- In what ways can we say thanks to them?
- Have we been praying for them?

b. Christ governs the Church as a result of His ascension.

This Scripture passage teaches that the Father raised Jesus from the dead and has “set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places” (the ascension of Christ – Eph. 1:20). As a result of His ascension, Christ is now “head over all things to the church” (Eph. 1:22).

Here is a passing note. If Jesus had to ascend to Heaven in order for the Church to be formed, then there could be no church until after His ascension into Heaven, otherwise the Church would be without a head!

Ephesians 1:22 means that Christ is the One who governs and leads the Church as a result from His newly ascended position in Heaven. In other words, Jesus has become the Leader of the Church as a result of His ascension into Heaven. Have you been allowing Christ to lead your life?

“He leadeth me, O blessed thought!
O words with heav’nly comfort fraught!
Whate’er I do, where’er I be
Still ’tis God’s hand that leadeth me.”

Take away:

- Have I been allowing Christ to govern my daily life?
- Am I surrendered to Him?
- Can I say that He truly King of my life?
- Have I been using my gifts for the Lord?

✚ Christ ascended to create a spiritual union with His saints on earth (John 14:19-20).

John 14:18-20

“I will not leave you comfortless (when He goes away): I will come to you (a reference to the Day of Pentecost). Yet a little while, and the world seeth me no more (Christ’s ascension back to Heaven); but ye see me (by faith and by experiencing their new relationship with Christ): because I live, ye shall live also. At that day (the descent of the Holy Spirit and the Day of Pentecost) ye shall know that I *am* in my Father, and ye in me, and I in you.

When Christ made the promise that He was going to ascend back into Heaven, He also gave another promise in connection with His ascension. This promise was that His presence would be realized in a new spiritual union that His disciples would share with Him (“I will come to you” – John 14:18, 20). This new spiritual union with Christ would be made possible by the indwelling Holy Spirit, who would come to dwell within His followers on the Day of Pentecost. When Christ ascended back to Heaven, He gave the promise that the Holy Spirit would permanently indwell His people and manifest His life to them in a new and wonderful way.

As a result of Christ’s ascension, a new relationship would be formed between Christ and His followers. It would be a new and intimate relationship with Christ. In sharing Christ’s life with His disciples (“ye in me, and I in you” – John 14:20), they would still possess an intimate awareness and fellowship with Jesus Christ, as the Holy Spirit reveals Christ’s life to the believer. This promised relationship with Christ is based upon Christ’s ascension. Christ would no longer be among His disciples physically, but as a result of the ascension and coming of the Holy Spirit, Christ would be in them spiritually (“ye in me, and I in you”).

Christ had to ascend to the Father in order to send the Holy Spirit at Pentecost which would result in His followers possessing this intimate and spiritual union with Jesus Christ, through the Holy Spirit’s work of presenting Christ to His New Testament saints (John 16:14).

We’ve seen already that one result of Christ’s ascension is that we possess a heavenly relationship and union “in Christ” which provides us with spiritual

blessings (Eph. 1:3). However, His ascension also gives the promise that we possess an earthly relationship and union with Him as well that would result in His disciples, including you and me, to experience a new intimate fellowship with Jesus Christ and a daily awareness of His abiding presence in our life (Gal. 2:20).

Take Away:

- Have you been experiencing your intimate relationship with Christ?
- Do you sense His presence and work in your life?
- Do have an ongoing relationship with Him?
- How close are you to the Lord?

✚ Christ's ascended so He can return in His Second Coming (Acts 1:10-11).

Acts 1:10-11

“And while they looked stedfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel; Which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven.”

The ascension of Christ gives us the assurance and reassurance that Jesus will someday return to planet earth. Just as He ascended up to Heaven in the clouds, after leaving the Mount of Olives, so He will someday come in like manner - returning to the Mount of Olives.

This is the promise of the Second Coming – not the promise of the Rapture (John 14:1-3; 1 Thess. 4:13-18)). Jesus is not going to return to earth in the Rapture. According to Scripture, in the Rapture, Christ will meet His saints in the air and then return with them to Heaven. However, Christ will return to earth at His Second Coming and His Second Coming is based upon His ascension into Heaven. Our prophetic destiny to rule and reign with Christ over the earth is based upon His ascension (Rev. 5:10).

Take Away:

- Are we looking forward to the time when Christ returns to earth in order to make everything right?
- Have we forgotten that this old world cannot have any lasting peace until the Prince of Peace returns?

- Are we looking forward to the establishment of the Millennial Kingdom which is promised in connection with the Second Advent (Rev. 20:1-7)?

✚ Christ ascended so He could receive full glory at the Father's right hand (John 17:4-5).

John 17:4-5

"I have glorified thee on the earth: I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do. And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was."

Jesus was looking ahead to His ascension or the time He would go back to the Father. This desire of Jesus clearly reveals that He was looking forward to have His full glory restored, which He possessed in Heaven, before His incarnation. This is the glory He shared with the Father before He left the splendor of Heaven and His seat beside the Father. Jesus wanted the original glory which He shared with the Father to be resumed. This clearly teaches the pre-existence of Christ before His incarnation (Rev. 22:13), which means that Jesus existed from eternity past and was coequal with the Father as God (Col. 1:15).

The Bible teaches that as a result of His ascension, Christ was once again glorified at the Father's right hand in Heaven (Heb. 1:3; Rev. 3:21). The "glory" that Jesus spoke about in John 17:5 was not only a radiant glory of light which emanated forth from His personal presence but also the honor and recognition He possessed at the Father's right hand. Jesus humbled Himself when coming to the earth (Heb. 2:9; Phil. 2:8). Jesus left the splendor of Heaven and the glory He once shared with the Father, when He came to earth.

"He left the splendor of heaven
Knowing His destiny
Was the lonely hill of Golgotha
There to lay down His life for me."

In John 17:5 Jesus looked forward to His ascension and having His full glory restored to Him once again, sharing the Father's glory at His right hand. Again, this would be a brilliant glory emanating forth from His presence, as John

witnessed (Rev. 1:16), but also a glory related to His honor and recognition as being the King of the ages (Isa. 6:1-3; John 12:41).

Take Away:

- Have we forgotten how much Jesus humbled Himself when He came to earth?
- When remembering that Christ has received full glory and honor at the Father's right hand, we must ask ourselves if we have been giving Him all the glory that He deserves?
- Have we been glorifying Christ by the way that we live and speak?

II. How many ascensions were there?

We move from the purposes of the ascension to asking an important question regarding the ascension of Christ. How many times did Christ ascend to Heaven? Some well-meaning Bible teachers conclude that there were two ascensions. First, Christ ascended back to the Father to present His blood sacrifice on the altar of Heaven. Second, at a later time, He ascended back to the Father permanently to sit upon the throne in Heaven. Is this a proper assessment? However, the Bible reveals that only one ascension occurred and this took place when Christ ascended back to Heaven (Acts 1:11) forty days after His resurrection (Acts 1:3).

The promise was that Christ would ascend to Heaven and not return until His Second Coming. This would confirm that there could not be two ascensions (one to present His blood on the heavenly altar) and another ascension that would occur at a later time. Christ concluded that when He ascended to the Father, He would not come back until His Second Coming which is the time He stands upon the Mount of Olives (Acts 1:11-12). However, some conclude there must have been a double ascension based upon Christ's words to Mary.

John 20:17

Jesus saith unto her, Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father (I have not yet gone back to Heaven to: but go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God.

Some expositors claim from this passage that Christ ascended to Heaven, to present His blood sacrifice to the Father, between the time He talked with Mary

Magdalene and appeared to His disciples. In other words, He had to ascend back to the Father after His resurrection to present a sample of His literal blood sacrifice on the altar of Heaven. They conclude that it was inappropriate for Mary to hold Jesus since He had not yet ascended to the Father. However, it was appropriate for Thomas to touch Jesus (John 20:27) since He had ascended to the Father in between these two meetings. Therefore, it's concluded that Jesus must have ascended to the Father and returned between His appearances to Mary and Thomas. However, there is no Biblical evidence that Jesus ascended to the Father and returned from His presence between these two appearances.

This view does not fit the facts stated in Scripture. Christ's priestly ministry in Heaven does not mean He took His own blood to Heaven in order to reoffer it on the heavenly altar. This is because Christ's priestly ministry is an ongoing or perpetual ministry (Heb. 7:25) that never ends based upon His blood sacrifice on the cross. Jesus said that the redemptive price was paid and finished (John 19:30) when He shed His blood and died on the cross. This means there was no need to offer this sacrifice on the heavenly altar. There is no strong Biblical evidence that Jesus literally sacrificed His blood on the altar in Heaven.

The literal sacrifice of Christ's shed blood was on the cross! The Bible speaks about the blood of the cross (Col. 1:20). Thank God it was shed on the cross! The Bible repeatedly says that Christ offered His blood on the cross – not in Heaven (Heb. 7:27; 9:14; 10:11-14; 12:2; Gal. 3:13 Eph. 2:16; Col. 2:14). The epistle of Hebrews repeatedly informs us that Christ offered Himself on the cross and later ascended to Heaven. The offering of His blood did not occur in Heaven. The cross is said to be God's mercy seat for lost humanity – not the altar in Heaven (1 John 2:2; 4:10). The Bible says there was only one offering and that occurred on the cross. God gave His only begotten Son as an offering on the cross (John 3:16).

Hebrews 9:14 interprets Hebrews 9:12 and states that Christ offered Himself and blood on the cross as God's sacrificial saving sacrifice: "How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?"

Hebrews 9:28 confirms the interpretation of Christ's offering on the cross: "So Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation."

Hebrews 10:12

“But this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God.”

The Bible repeatedly teaches that the “offering” of Christ’s blood occurred on the cross and afterward He sat down on His throne beside the Father indicating the offering was complete.

Galatians 3:13

“Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed *is* every one that hangeth on a tree.”

Ephesians 2:16

“And that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby.”

Colossians 1:20

“And, having made peace through the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself; by him, *I say*, whether *they be* things in earth, or things in heaven.”

2 Timothy 4:6

“For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand.”

The purging of our sins and offering took place on the cross and afterward Christ ascended to Heaven to declare and represent this purging of our sins as being complete (Heb. 1:3). To conclude that there is a literal heavenly place where Christ sacrificed His blood goes against the whole argument of the book of Hebrews and the rest of the Bible, which states that Christ offered His blood on the cross – not in Heaven.

Dwight Pentecost has said:

“It was not necessary for Christ to physically transport His physical blood into heaven to provide a basis for His priestly ministry; but because of His blood on the cross, He was able to enter into His priestly ministry.”

What is Hebrews 9:12 teaching?

Hebrews 9:12

“Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but **by (NOT WITH – but by means of, on account of, by reason of, because of)** his own blood (the blood that was shed on the cross – vv. 14-15 with 25-28 explain the meaning of this verse!) **he entered in once into the holy place** (the place where God manifests His presence in Heaven to become our High Priest, as the message of Hebrews and context suggest – Heb. 9:1-11), having obtained (having already obtained when dying on the cross) eternal redemption for us”(as the message of Hebrews repeatedly verifies – 9:14-15; 10:11-14; 12:2).

This Bible verse is teaching that Christ’s blood was shed on the cross and is now represented in Heaven through Christ’s priestly ministry. The preposition (“by” – dia) in Hebrews 9:12 does not mean that Jesus literally went to heaven with a vial of His own blood in order to sprinkle it upon the altar. The preposition can also be understood to mean “through,” “by reason of,” “on account of,” “because of,” and “for this reason.” All of these acceptable translations of this Greek word, including the English preposition translated as “by” remind us how the blood of Jesus Christ, which was shed on the cross, has become the channel and ground of blessing for all believers through His priestly ministry.

This verse tells us that Christ’s blood which was shed on the cross is *represented* in Heaven through Christ’s priestly ministry. It does not teach that He took His literal blood to Heaven. However, over the years that has been some difference of opinion in regards to how to interpret this verse. Some good men suggest that Jesus literally took a vial of His own sacrificial blood into Heaven and offered it upon the altar whereas an equal number of good men suggest that the reference to blood best explains His work as our mediator and High Priest in Heaven (1 Tim. 2:5). This is my view and understanding of this passage.

It seems that the believer can defend the doctrine of the blood of Jesus Christ without coming to the conclusion that the blood of Jesus is literally represented in Heaven. The blood will never lose its power for it is represented in Heaven

through Christ's priestly ministry. Jesus did not transport his blood from the cross into Heaven. However, His sacrificial blood of Jesus Christ is represented in Heaven in the sense that Christ's blood, which was shed upon the cross (not the offering of His literal blood on the altar of Heaven) was made affective in the presence of God the Father on our behalf, through the priestly ministry of Christ. Christ is in Heaven today declaring the efficacy and value of His blood that was shed on the cross, on our behalf (Heb. 7:25; Rom. 8:34).

This verse does not teach that Jesus took His shed blood to Heaven but that He took Himself into Heaven, to appear there as our Great High Priest. It's in Heaven that He presents Himself as our Savior who died on the cross and granted our complete pardon and acquittal. The nail marks on Jesus' hands and feet are in Heaven (Zech. 13:6) but the literal blood of Jesus is not there. Jesus, as our High Priest, is in Heaven REPRESENTING His shed blood and sacrifice on the cross before the Father and reminding the Father of His precious blood that was shed on the behalf of His saints.

Hebrews 12:24 declares:

"And to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than *that of Abel*."

This verse is teaching the same thing as Hebrews 9:12. The sprinkled blood speaks of the forgiveness we have received through the shedding of Christ's blood on the cross since the cross was God's altar upon which Christ was slain. The blood of sprinkling occurred on the cross – not in Heaven.

The point is this. When Christ ascended to Heaven, He presented to God the full value of the blood that He shed at the cross, which was God's New Testament altar on which Christ died. Again, some teach that Christ literally carried His blood into Heaven and offered it on the heavenly altar based upon Hebrews 9:12 and 12:24, but it seems better to understand that Christ shed His blood on the cross (Col. 1:20) which is God's altar upon which Christ died, and then ascended to Heaven, as our High Priest, to present the saving merits of His blood, which today have been made known in the sanctuary of Heaven through His priestly ministry.

I believe the blood of Christ is found in Heaven (Hebrews 12:24) only in a representative (symbolic way), or in the sense that the Father sees the shedding

of His Son's blood through Christ's priestly ministry, as sufficient ground for our total forgiveness and acceptance before Him (Rom. 8:34). The saving value and significance of Christ's literal blood is reflected in His blood sacrifice on the cross and this same literal blood, which was shed on Calvary's cross, is now represented in Heaven through Christ's priestly ministry in the throne room of Heaven.

Leon Morris aptly remarks:

"While the sacrifice Christ offered took place on a physical cross on a definite day in a definite land on the physical earth, the essence of that sacrifice was that it was effective in the presence of God."

Christ shed His blood upon the cross (Heb. 9:12; Col. 1:20) offering Himself to God upon the cross (Heb. 9:14). As a result of His blood sacrifice and offering upon the cross, He went to Heaven into God's presence, within the "the holy place" (Heb. 9:12, 24), or the very throne room of God, and presented Himself as the risen Christ, whose blood was shed, offered, and accepted by God upon the cross.

Christ's risen presence in Heaven, the Holy of Holies, the very throne room of God's presence, demonstrates that Christ's sacrificial death and blood was already accepted by the Father upon the cross (Rom. 3:24) and that His blood paid for the sins of the world. Therefore, there was no need for Christ to offer His blood upon a heavenly altar. There is no need for the literal and physical blood to be reoffered in Heaven. The value of Christ's risen and ascended life in the very throne room of God's presence represents the value of His shed blood on the cross. As a result, there is no need for His blood to be sprinkled on the altar of Heaven.

The blood of Christ was not *offered* in Heaven; however, it is *represented* in Heaven as the ground of our justification and salvation (Rom. 5:9). The offering of Christ's blood took place on earth upon the cross of Calvary whereas the representing of His blood occurs in Heaven on a daily basis "where Christ ever liveth to make intercession for them" (Heb. 7:25).

"And now for me He stands,
Before the Father's throne.
He shows His wounded hands
and names me as His own."

So what did Jesus mean when he spoke to Mary in John 20:17 and said, “Touch me not; for I have not yet ascended to my Father?” Jesus was not focusing on a separate ascension but the only ascension that would occur, 40 days after His resurrection (Acts 1:3). However, Jesus was not really focusing on the exact TIMING of His ascension but was talking about TOUCHING Him (holding on to Him) in view that He was soon going to ascend to the Father.

Some suggest that Jesus may have been trying to get a message across to Mary that she was about to experience a new spiritual relationship with Jesus (a spiritual union and intimacy – not an earthly mother and son relationship). This new non-physical relationship would come about as a result of the Spirit’s entrance into the world and how He would reveal Christ’s spiritual life within her (John 14:16-20) in view of the Pentecost.

Jesus was saying, in effect, “Having physical contact with me is not the way My presence will be experienced. A new spiritual relationship will begin with My ascension and the gift of the Holy Spirit which is given to the Church.” This view appeals to some expositors; however, it does not seem to explain the statement “touch me not for I have not ascended.”

The best explanation of Jesus’ words seems to be that Mary was holding onto Jesus as though she would never let Him go. She wanted to maintain physical communion and fellowship with Jesus, but in doing so, she would not be sharing the message of His resurrection with others. This is why Jesus says, “but go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father” (John 20:17).

Essentially, and very simply, Jesus was saying that she could not cling to Him any longer (“Touch me not”). And the reason for this is because “I have not ascended to the Father.” First, in saying this, Jesus wanted Mary to take the message that He has risen from the dead and share it with others. In other words, Jesus was saying, “Mary, you can’t stay here clinging to me, since I have not yet gone back to the Father. There is work to do until I return to the Father. Go and tell others of my resurrection from the dead and let others know what you have seen, while I am still present on earth.” it was the time for telling good news (the Gospel), not for remaining with Jesus ceaselessly. She needed to go on a mission and share Christ’s resurrection with others.

Second, in sharing these words with Mary (“touch me not”), she also needed to learn the lesson that she would no longer be able to possess physical fellowship and contact with Him, since He was going back to the Father. Jesus was teaching that not until she gets to Heaven, and is reunited with Him in Heaven, would it be possible for her and all believers to maintain physical contact with Him and live with Him forever, enjoying His physical presence. “Mary, we can no longer enjoy the physical fellowship we enjoyed on earth for I am going back to the Father but when you rejoin me in Heaven, this fellowship will be resumed. And it will be wonderful.” In the words of the hymn writer, “When we all get to Heaven what a day of rejoicing it will be!”

Jesus was preparing Mary for a long separation since He was going to ascend to the Father. At the same time, He was inferring that there was coming a time when all of His disciples could touch Him once again, the time when she and all believers will be there with Him in Heaven, to enjoy physical and visual contact with Jesus forever.

“Safe in the arms of Jesus,
Safe on His gentle breast;
There by His love o’ershaded,
Sweetly my soul shall rest.”

John 20:17

“Jesus saith unto her, Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father: but go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God.”

When Jesus says to Mary, “I’ve not yet ascended to the Father,” He was teaching that He would soon ascend to the Father and afterward Mary and the rest of God’s saints would join Him someday. It would be at this time when they would enjoy one another’s physical presence and fellowship. Jesus was saying that this was the time for telling the good news of the Gospel; it was not the time to physically remain with Jesus on the earth. This would occur later in Heaven, after He ascended back to the Father and they are once again joined together for eternity!

Jesus earlier said in John 14:2-3:

“In my Father's house are many mansions: if *it were* not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you (the ascension of Christ). And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, *there ye may be also.*”

In John 20:17 Jesus was teaching that He would soon ascend to the Father and afterward Mary and the rest of God's saints would join Him someday. It would during this time that all of God's saints would enjoy the physical fellowship and presence of Jesus Christ. But now God's disciples had work to do! This is what Jesus taught when He said “that where I am, there ye may be also” (John 14:3) and when Paul said, “so shall we ever be with the Lord” (1 Thess. 4:17). Until then, Mary needed to carry out a mission. His ascension had not yet taken place. This was the time for to share about Christ resurrection. There will be a future time (another time) when they would enjoy one another's physical presence and fellowship in Heaven. This interpretation seems natural and understandable.

It's interesting that Thomas was told to touch Jesus in order to increase His faith in the physical resurrection of Christ (John 20:17). However, Mary was told to not touch or cling to Jesus, so she might increase her witness of the resurrected Christ and wait until a future day when she would once again be with Jesus in Heaven.

The point is this, none of these “touch” accounts with the resurrected Christ have anything to do with Christ offering His blood sacrifice in Heaven.

Here is a summary of what we have studied.

- The Bible says there was only one ascension and not two, as some suggest by John 20:17. There is no Biblical evidence that Jesus ascended to the Father to present His blood on the altar and then returned to once again reascend to the Father. There is only one ascension mentioned in the Bible and the angel informed His disciples that Jesus would not return to earth, following this ascension, until the time of His Second Coming (Acts 1:11).
- In John 20:17, Jesus tells Mary to not touch Him because He was going to ascend back to the Father. The time for fellowship would occur later in Heaven, but right now, before Christ ascended to the Father, Mary had a

mission to share with others of her encounter with the resurrected Christ. She was to share the good news about Christ resurrection and not cling to Him at this point.

- Hebrews 9:12 is speaking of Christ's priestly ministry in Heaven, based upon the shedding of His blood on the cross (Heb. 9:14-15, 25-28). Because of the shedding of Christ's blood on the cross, He became our High Priest to represent His sacrificial blood in Heaven on our behalf. It seems better to understand the terms "sanctuary" and "true tabernacle" of Heaven (Heb. 8:2) in the epistle of Hebrews as an antitype (a New Testament event prefigured in the Old Testament Tabernacle) which is a representation of the priestly ministry of Christ in God's presence. The "true tabernacle" is the heavenly sphere where Christ's service takes place. Although there is undoubtedly a structure in Heaven that resembles in some manner the earthly Tabernacle (Heb. 8:5; 9:23) with a Holy of Holies (Rev. 14:17; 15:8; 16:1, 17), the writer of Hebrews seems to be teaching that the "true tabernacle" (Heb. 8:2) is fulfilled in Christ and is not in this instance portraying a place, but a Person, and is a reference to Christ's priestly service rendered in God's presence (Heb. 7:25).
- The blood of Christ is symbolically represented in Heaven (Heb. 12:24), through Christ's priestly ministry, who declares the value or efficacy of His shed blood on the cross as sufficient payment for our sins (Rom. 8:34).
- The Bible repeatedly teaches the blood of Christ was shed on the cross and this was the offering that God required and accepted (Col. 1:20; Rev. 1:8; 5:9). The offering was made on the cross – not in Heaven. The emphasis in Heaven is "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain" (Rev. 5:12) which looks back to the cross and not an altar in Heaven. The significance of the literal character of Christ's blood is connected with the shedding of blood upon the cross – not with Heaven. It was shed once when offered upon the cross (Heb. 10:10, 12, 14.) never to be reoffered again. The blood of Christ was not *reoffered* in Heaven; it is *represented* in Heaven as the ground of our justification and salvation.
- The ascension *follows* the offering; it is not *part* of the offering (Heb. 1:3; 12:2).

Take Away:

- Have we been sharing the message of the Gospel until we go to be with Jesus?
- What should you be doing for Christ today?
- What has Christ called you to do?
- Are we comforted by the truth that we will live with Jesus forever?
- Can you imagine what it will be like when you are surrounded by His ascended glory and see Jesus for the very first time?