



The Inscrutable Question: Ascension of Christ Illustrated by Roman Triumphal Procession, Ephesians 4:8; Sequence of Events between Death & Ascension

- 11- On reaching the Capitoline Temple the general bowed to the statue of Jupiter, he touched its knee with the sceptre, gave a prayer of thanksgiving for the victory, and then laid the laurel wreath on the statue's lap. A certain number of the POWs were then sacrificed to Jupiter. The rest of the captured enemy, from the leader on down to the lowliest private, were taken to the Mamertine / MA-mar-TYNE / Dungeon and brutally slaughtered.
- 12- The Triumphal Procession took all day at least and sometimes went on for a couple of days. At its conclusion there was a public banquet that lasted for six to eight hours. During this banquet the general was given a House of Triumph in whose entryway was placed his statue. He was given a large sum of money and a lifetime pension.
- 13- Elements of the Roman Triumphal Procession are used as illustrations in several New Testament passages including the one we are about to note.
- 14- In the exegesis we are going to see the Lord's ascension illustrated by the Triumphal Procession. The context also reveals the Lord's descension into Hades to visit pre-resurrection saints.
- 15- **Ephesians 4:8** begins with an inferential conjunction:

διό / dio / - This denotes a self-evident inference. It can be translated "for this reason," or "therefore."

Next comes the third person singular, present active indicative of the verb:

λέγω / lego / - "to communicate"; the third person refers to a quote about to be stated from the Old Testament. "Therefore, it (the Old Testament) says, ..."

present: Gnostic; expresses a state or condition that perpetually exists and is therefore a universal truth from the Old Testament, specifically, a quote from Psalm 68:18.

active: The Old Testament produces the action of the verb.

indic.: Declarative, a statement of biblical fact.

- 1) The passage about to be quoted was written by David and is one of the 16 Messianic Psalms. In this one David presents the Messiah in a Triumphal Procession following the defeat of His enemies.
- 2) All Psalms were originally set to music, this one apparently was composed for a Triumphal Procession. It includes prayers in verses 1-3 and 28-31, praise in verses 4-6, 19-20, and 32-35, thanksgiving in verses 7-10 and 15-18, and oracles in verses 11-14 and 21-23.
- 3) Its unifying theme is the march of Messiah to victory from the establishment of His kingdom in the past and looks forward to the defeat of all opposition in the future.
- 4) Verse 18 depicts the Messiah as having successfully defeated His enemies, made them His captives, and received tribute from the conquered nation. Conquering Messiah chooses Jerusalem to establish His eternal headquarters.
- 5) Verse 18 is the verse in Psalm 68 that is quoted by Paul in Ephesians 4:8.

Psalm 68:18 - You have ascended on high, You have led captive Your captives; You have received gifts because of men.

6) The Holy Spirit inspired Paul to alter this quote somewhat for the New Testament. David was not aware of the Church Age and as a result the ascension of Messiah takes on certain aspects under Plan B that were not revealed to Old Testament writers.

7) In Paul's version the final reference is to spiritual gifts. The first sentence is quoted in its original context because it makes reference to the Lord's Triumphal Procession into heaven followed by the souls and human spirits of those who had been detained in Paradise.

8) "Ascension" is the aorist active participle of the verb:

ἀναβαίνω / *anabaino* / - "ascension"

aorist: Constative; indicates a momentary action; the ascension occurred in a matter of seconds.

active: Jesus Christ produces the action of the ascension.

part.: Temporal: "when He ascended"

Next comes the preposition:

εἰς / *eis* / - "into"; plus the adverbial accusative of measure from:

ὕψος / *hupsos* / - "high place, highest as compared to other dimensions; the third heaven."

v. 8 - Therefore, it says, "When He ascended into heaven"

9) The ascension is a doctrine of Christology that refers to the transfer of our Lord's true humanity from time into eternity in resurrection body.

10) The duration of the ascension would be measured in human terms as probably a few seconds. On arrival in heaven the Lord was instantly glorified when the ascended Shekinah Glory was seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

11) This end result is called the session, also a doctrine of Christology, and refers to the glorification of our Lord at the right hand of the Father. Deity does not sit. Thus, the session relates only to the resurrected humanity of Jesus.

12) Following the resurrection, the Lord remained on earth for forty days before the ascension during which we are able to learn a number of the characteristics of the resurrection body.

13) The resurrected body of Christ was able to move through the stone wall of Joseph's tomb. The stone was removed from the tomb's opening not to let Christ out but to reveal to those outside that He was gone.

14) When He joined the apostles at the Upper Room he did not open the door but rather walked through it.

John 20:19 - When therefore it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and when the doors were shut [**present passive participle of κλείω / *kleio* !: "had been locked and barred"**] where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in their midst, and said to them, "Peace be with you."

15) The ascension demonstrated the capability of the resurrection body for vertical movement plus the capacity for unlimited speed.

16) Here is the sequence of events that took place over a 44-day period beginning with the physical death of our Lord and ending with His session: **(1)** His human spirit was dismissed to the Father (Luke 23:46), **(2)** His soul was transferred to Hades (Luke 23:43), **(3)** His body was buried in Joseph's tomb (Luke 23:53), **(4)** due to an earthquake tombs were opened in and around Jerusalem (Matthew 27:51-52), **(5)** He organized the ascension of Old Testament saints in Paradise (Ephesians 4:8-10), **(6)** His trichotomous separation lasted for three days and three nights (Matthew 12:38-40; Jonah 1:17), after which **(7)** His human spirit was returned to His body by the omnipotence of the Father (Romans 6:4; Ephesians 1:20; Colossians 2:12; 1 Thessalonians 1:10; 1 Peter 1:21), **(8)** His soul was returned to His body by the omnipotence of the Holy Spirit (Romans 1:4; 8:11; 1 Peter 3:18), **(9)** He was raised from the dead in resurrection body on First Fruits (Matthew 28:1, 5-6), **(10)** those whose corpses were in the opened tombs were resuscitated and they spoke about the upcoming transfer of their souls and spirits from Paradise to heaven (Matthew 27:53), **(11)** He delivered a victorious proclamation to the demons in Tartarus (1 Peter 3:19; Jude 6; 2 Peter 2:4), **(12)** the Lord appeared in a series of ten post-resurrection Christophanies during the next 40 days to:

1. Mary Magdalene (John 2:11-18),
2. the other women (Matthew 28:9-10),
3. two disciples on Emmaus road (Luke 24:13-32),
4. Peter (Luke 24:33-35),
5. the apostles minus Thomas (John 20:19-23),
6. the apostles including Thomas (John 20:26-31),
7. seven disciples (John 21:1-25),
8. the apostles plus 500 (Matthew 28:16-20),
9. His half-brother, James (1 Corinthians 15:7), and
10. the apostles at the ascension (Acts 1:3-9);

(13) He ascended from the Mount of Olives taking the souls and human spirits from Paradise into heaven in a Triumphal Procession (Acts 1:9; Ephesians 4:8-10), and **(14)** he was seated at the right hand of the Father (Hebrews 12:2).

17) The historical account of the ascension is recorded in:

Acts 1:9 - Jesus was lifted up before the apostles' very eyes, and a cloud hid Him out of their sight.

Acts 1:10 - And as they were gazing intently up in the sky as He was departing, behold two angels in white apparel stood beside them;

v. 11 - and they said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven."

18) In verse 11 we find the aorist passive participle of the verb:

ἀναλαμβάνω / *analambano* / - "to take up"

aorist: Culminative; connotes the attainment of the end of a process, i.e., the ascension is a completed act.

pass.: Jesus Christ receives the action of the verb, the ascension occurring by means of divine omnipotence.

part.: “has been taken up from you into heaven.”

- 19) This is very instructive for from it we learn that the Lord’s ascension into heaven was complete by the time the angel spoke to the apostles. The eleven were standing staring up into the sky and the Lord, along with all the Old Testament saints, was already in heaven.
- 20) This is the background for the statement in Ephesians 4:8. Here is the corrected translation for as far as we have gone:

Ephesians 4:8 - Therefore, it says, “When Jesus ascended into heaven ...”

The Lord produces some action at the ascension. It is described by what comes next in the verse, the aorist active indicative of the verb:

αἰχμαλωτεύω / *aichmaloteuo* / - Lit.: Prisoner of war.

The word came to mean “to lead captive.”

Kittel, Gerhard (ed.). *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. Vol. 1. Translated by Geoffrey W. Bromiley. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1964), 195:

In both the Old and New Testaments the “prisoner of war” is a person who stands in special need of God’s help having been swallowed up by a terrible enemy.

The thought of imprisonment in war is carried over into the inner moral and religious struggle of man. Paul shows a partiality for military images and applies it in different ways, e.g., to express the subjection of spirits to Christ (Eph.4:8).

- 21) The reason these Old Testament believers were detained in the Paradise compartment was because they were once held captive by their sinful nature. During physical life they believed in the saving work of the coming Messiah but because their sins would not be judged in Messiah until the Incarnation, they could not be transferred to heaven at their physical deaths.
- 22) Consequently, they were in a sense held captive until after the judgment of the cross. Once their sins were judged in Christ then their faith qualified them to be moved from Paradise to heaven at the ascension of the Lord.
- 23) Thus, these saints were made “captive” by God in Paradise until their sins were judged. Nevertheless, their faith in Christ preserved their souls in Paradise until the events on the cross became an historical reality.

Ephesians 4:8 - Therefore, it says, “When Jesus ascended into heaven He led captives [aorist active indicative of: αἰχμαλωτεύω / *aichmaloteuo* /] in a Triumphal Procession.”

aorist: Constativ; views the action in its entirety but with no reference to its beginning, end, or progress. It is simply stated as a fact that at the ascension of Christ, Old Testament saints held captive also ascended in tandem with Him in a Triumphal Procession into heaven.

active: Jesus Christ produces the action at the ascension.

indic.: Declarative; this is a statement of historical and biblical fact.

- 24) At the ascension these captives are said to have been led in tandem out from a state of captivity, indicated by the cognate accusative direct object from the noun:



αἰχμαλωσία / *aichmalosia* / - “a state of captivity”

Paul employs the metaphor of a Triumphal Procession. He presents the verbal picture of Old Testament saints following the ascending Lord into the third heaven.

Ephesians 4:8 - He [Jesus Christ, after His resurrection and during His ascension] led a host of captives [Old Testament saints who died prior to the resurrection] in a Triumphal Procession from a state of captivity [the Paradise compartment of Hades]. And He gave spiritual gifts to men.