

CHURCH.

LESSON 7

1	PRAYER
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Group leader. Pray for God's guidance through his Spirit, for awareness of his presence and for listening to his voice. Commit your group and this lesson about church building to the Lord.

2	SHARING (20 minutes) [QUIET TIMES] 1 CORINTHIANS 6 - 8
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Take turns and share (or read from your notes) in short what you have learned from one of your quiet times out of the assigned Bible passages (1 Corinthians 6 - 8).

Listen to the person sharing, take him serious and accept him. Do not discuss what he shares. Take notes.

3	MEMORISATION (5 minutes) [KEY VERSES IN JOHN] (1) JOHN 1:14
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Review two by two.

(1) **John 1:14.** The Word became flesh (i.e. took on the human nature) and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only (i.e. the Only begotten) who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

4	TEACHING (85 minutes) [CHURCH FESTIVAL] ASCENSION: COMMEMORATING THE ENTHRONEMENT OF CHRIST
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Introduce. Ascension is the Christian festival in which we commemorate the ascension of Jesus Christ from earth to heaven and his enthronement in heaven as the King of kings. We will learn what the Bible teaches about the ascension and enthronement of Jesus Christ and its effect on Christians. We will learn how his ascension and enthronement has been prophesied; what happened when he ascended and was enthroned; and how his ascension and enthronement affects everyone.

A. PROPHECIES CONCERNING THE ASCENSION OF JESUS CHRIST

The Psalms were written about 1000 years B.C. The book of Isaiah was written about 700 B.C. And Jesus prophesied about his ascension just before his death in 30 A.D., thus more than 40 days before it actually happened.

1. Psalm 24:1-10. Ascended to be the Representative of Christians with God.

This Psalm of David was composed and sung when the ark was moved to its new location in a tent in the city of David (Zion) (2 Samuel chapter 6). The ark was regarded as the dwelling place of God on earth (1 Chronicles 13:6). At that occasion David brought thirty thousand chosen men to fetch the previously captured ark from the Philistines. He and the whole house of Israel celebrated with all their might before the Lord, with songs and with harps, lyres, tambourines, sistrums and cymbals. The people rejoiced, shouted and sounded the trumpets. They sang that the earth belongs to the LORD, including everything in it and all who live in it. They sacrificed a bull and a fattened calf every six paces. And David leapt and danced before the Lord with all his might.

Then the question is asked: "Who may ascend the hill of the Lord (Zion)? Who may stand in his holy place (the tent on Zion that preceded the temple on Mount Moria)?" And the answer comes back: "He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to an idol (that is, to any "god" that is not the God of the Bible) or swear by what is false. He will receive blessing from the Lord and vindication (righteousness) from God his Saviour." The blessing in the Bible consists of the spiritual and eternal realities as the kingdom of God (Matthew 25:34), the promised Holy Spirit (Galatians 3:14) and every spiritual blessing like adoption as God's sons and daughters, redemption and forgiveness (Ephesians 1:3-7). The vindication or righteousness consists of salvation. In the context of Psalm 24 such people are collectively called "the generation of those who seek him", that is, the kind of people who seek the reality and presence of the God of the Bible.

But Psalm 24 is a Messianic prophecy pointing forward to the ascension of Jesus Christ into heaven! And in the light of the New Testament revelation, no one may ascend to heaven and stand in God's holy presence except Jesus Christ! No one qualifies on the basis of their own merit. No one has clean hands or a pure heart (Romans 3:9-18). No one can accumulate righteousness by keeping the law (Galatians 3:10-11) or by doing good works (Ephesians 2:8-9). All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23).

But Jesus Christ qualifies! He is completely sinless and perfect in character (Hebrews 4:15; 7:26,28). Jesus Christ may ascend into heaven and may stand in God's holy presence as our Representative.

Jesus Christ ascended into heaven to act as the Representative of Christians with God in heaven.

"For Christ did not enter a man-made sanctuary that was only a copy of the true one; he entered heaven itself, now to appear for us in God's presence (Hebrews 9:24). Christians celebrate this on ascension.

2. Psalm 68:16-20,24-25,28-30. Ascended to bring his conquered captives to God.

Because God already reigns on the mountains of Israel, especially on Zion, Psalm 68:17 cannot refer to the first time the ark was brought to Zion. It refers to the times that the ark was taken to accompany the army of Israel in a war and then returned to its resting place in Zion. The same liturgy as above was used (2 Samuel 11:11; cf. 1 Samuel 4:3-9).

God is depicted as the triumphant Conqueror ascending from the battle to his dwelling on high (the tent on Zion), followed by uncountable number of chariots, leading captives in his train and receiving gifts (tribute) from the conquered nations. Then the procession of God is elaborated (literally): "The procession of my God and King in holiness (the splendour of his divine characteristics) seated on the throne" (verse 24); in front are the singers; after them the musicians and the maidens playing the tambourines (verse 25). God is invoked to crush the heads of his enemies (verse 21), that is, to scatter the nations who delight to war against God's people (verse 30; cf. Isaiah 27:1). These nations are described as "the beast among the reeds", probably a reference to the hippopotamus (Hebrew: behemoth) (Job 40:15-24) or the crocodile (Hebrew: leviathan) (Job 41:1-11) and represented the hostile nations that oppress and persecute God's people.

Jesus Christ ascended into heaven as the triumphant Conqueror, carrying captives in his trail.

"This is why it says: When he ascended on high, he led captives in his train and gave gifts to men. What does 'he ascended' mean except that he also descended to the lowest earthly regions? He who descended is the very one who ascended higher than all the heavens, in order to fill the whole universe" (Ephesians 4:8-10). What is said about God in the Old Testament (Psalm 68), is fulfilled by Jesus Christ in the New Testament!

3. Isaiah 9:6-7. Ascended to establish, uphold and reign over his kingdom of righteousness.

"For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called: Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it, with justice and righteousness from that time on and for ever" (Isaiah 9:6-7).

The child that is born on earth will be called "the Mighty God" and has the same divine nature as God "the Everlasting Father". While the LORD is called "the Mighty God" in Isaiah 10:20-22, the Lord Jesus Christ is also called "the Mighty God" in Isaiah 9:6. After his ascension and enthronement in heaven the government of the whole universe is on his shoulder. Of the increase of his government in every country in the world there is no end. Jesus Christ brings peace between God and man through his sacrifice of atonement (Romans 5:1-11). He destroyed the enmity between Jews and non-Jews and established peace between them through the cross (Ephesians 2:14-17). If today there is no peace between Jew and non-Jew, then it is because they do not want it. (They rebel against God and his plan)! The prophecy says that Jesus Christ would establish his kingdom and uphold it (by reigning over it) with justice and righteousness from his first coming unto all eternity!

Jesus Christ ascended into heaven to reign over all countries and the whole universe.

4. John 3:9-13. Ascended to reveal the earthly and heavenly things to man.

Christ's descent from heaven revealed the heavenly things and is followed by his ascension into heaven.

(1) Jesus Christ is the only one in history that has *descended* from heaven and again *ascended* to heaven!

Jesus Christ claims that no one in human history has ever ascended from the earth into heaven to find out what the heavenly things are. Only Jesus Christ has dwelt in heaven and has come from heaven. Only he knows the heavenly things and reveals the heavenly things (John 3:9-13). Jesus Christ *descended* to the lower earthly regions (literally: the lowest places on earth) and then *ascended* higher than all the heavens (higher than the air or atmosphere, higher than the starry universe, he ascended to the heaven where God dwells)¹ in order to fill the whole universe (Ephesians 4:9-10). No other prophet that ever lived in history or that made a claim to be "a prophet" has ever come from heaven or returned to heaven! Enoch and Elijah ascended into heaven, but they never descended from heaven. All the prophets of other religions and sects in this world still lie dead in their graves. They never descended from heaven and they never ascended into heaven.

A number of people in history have been *raised* from the dead, but afterwards died again! Jesus Christ is the only being with a human nature who has ever been *resurrected* from the dead and still lives! Jesus Christ is the only One who descended from heaven and ascended into heaven. This fact proves that Jesus Christ was the Greatest Prophet of all

¹ Greek: κατεβη εις τα κατωτερα [μερη] της γης + αναβας υπερανω παντων των ουρανων

times and that he was much more than just the Greatest Prophet! He is not only the Highest High Priest, the Greatest Prophet and the Most powerful King, but also GOD! He is God who took on the human nature without letting go of his divine nature. He is God who not only revealed himself in the cloud and fire (Exodus 3:2; 13:21; 19:18), but also in the historic Person, Jesus Christ (John 1:1,14,18). He is not a human being who pretends to be God, but is God who took on the human nature without letting go of his divine nature!

(2) Jesus Christ descended from heaven to reveal the earthly things and the heavenly things to mankind (John 3:12).

In John 3:11 Jesus says that John the Baptist and he himself knew and testified about “the heavenly things”. But the Jewish religious leaders did not accept their testimony. Jesus could say this, because with his penetrating eyes he could look right into the heart of these people and see their hesitation to believe what Jesus was teaching (cf. John 2:25).

In John 3:12, Jesus says, “I have spoken to you of earthly things and you do not believe; how then will you believe if I speak of heavenly things?”

The earthly things.

Jesus had been speaking about things, which are heavenly in character and in origin, but *take place on earth*. For example: “the earthly things” are the heavenly things in character and origin, but take place on earth, such as:

- the coming of the Messiah to his own people (Isaiah 53:3; John 1:11)
- the death and resurrection of the Messiah (Isaiah 53:5; John 2:19)
- the proclamation of the good news to the Gentiles everywhere in the world (Isaiah 49:6; John 3:16-17)
- and rebirth (the baptism with the Spirit) which is absolutely necessary (Deuteronomy 30:6; Ezekiel 36:25-28; John 1:33; John 3:3-8)

Already in the Old Testament God spoke about these earthly things, “I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you. I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws” (Ezekiel 36:25-27). Regeneration takes place within the sphere of human experience on earth. Therefore anybody, who read the Old Testament and reflected on his own natural inability to please God, would have understood the necessity of being born again!

But although rebirth (regeneration) of people by the Holy Spirit is clearly taught in the Old Testament and by Jesus in the New Testament, the majority of Jews rejected it. Nicodemus and people like him thought that “these earthly things” were incredible. So how would they ever believe when Jesus spoke to them about “the heavenly things”?

The heavenly things.

The heavenly things are things outside (beyond) the knowledge of man until they are revealed by Christ. “No one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him” (Matthew 11:25-27). Only the Son of God has always been in the presence of God and knows all the decisions that were made in heaven. No man has ever ascended into heaven to find out what the heavenly things are. Only Jesus Christ has descended (was sent) from heaven and knows the heavenly things and reveals the heavenly things, such as:

- The nature (being) of the one and only God (Matthew 11:27)
- God’s heavenly plan is to save his people, not only believing Jews, but also believing non-Jews from every nation in the world (John 3:13-18).
- God’s heavenly plan is to save them through the death and resurrection of his Son, Jesus Christ.

“The heavenly things” lie completely beyond the reach of man, their knowledge or imagination, until they are revealed to man. No man could have revealed who God is (John 1:18). No man could have invented God’s plan of salvation (1 Corinthians 2:7-10). Jesus Christ not only reveals God’s heavenly plan, but also executes it (Revelation 5:1-5)!

5. John 14:1-3. Ascended to prepare a place for his disciples.

Jesus Christ ascended into heaven to prepare a place for his disciples.

When Jesus said that he was going to away to a place where his disciples could not come (his ascension into heaven), they were filled with disturbing emotions. They were *sad* because Christ said he was going to leave them. They were *ashamed* because they had been quarrelling about who was the greatest. They were *perplexed* because Jesus had predicted that one of them would betray him, another would deny him and all would fall away from him. They were *wavering* in their faith because they were probably thinking how it was possible that the Messiah could be betrayed. At the same time they *loved* Jesus and hoped that things would change. Their faith was being tested. That is why Jesus encourages them, “Keep on trusting in God and in me.”

Jesus said that he was going to prepare a place for his disciples. “The house of God” is *heaven* before the second coming of Christ (Psalm 33:13-14; Isaiah 63:15) and *the new earth* after the second coming of Christ (Isaiah 65:16-17; Revelation 21:1-3). The word “rooms” refers to dwelling-places. The word “place” refers to where Christians will dwell, their position or state and final destination. By his death Jesus made it possible for his disciples to live with him forever as their eternal destiny. By his resurrection he prepares the disciples for their place of destiny. And by his ascension he prepares that place of destiny for his disciples.

He would come back and take them to be with him. Jesus was not thinking of the physical death of a believer in the first place, but of his own second coming. At his second coming he would welcome the believers (1 Thessalonians 4:13-17). They would as it were embrace one another and look one another in the eyes! That is why his departure in his ascension is not a calamity, but a blessing (cf. John 16:7)!

This passage may also be applied to the physical death of a believer, because his spirit would also be welcomed in heaven (Philippians 1:21-23). It is this living hope (expectation) that motivates a believer to continue to trust in Jesus Christ!

6. John 16:7. Ascended to pour out the Holy Spirit on his disciples.

Jesus Christ ascended into heaven to pour out the Holy Spirit on his disciples.

Jesus said that it would be for the advantage of his disciples that he was going away (that is, that he would ascend into heaven), because then the Holy Spirit would come “to be face to face” (Greek: *pros*) with them. Jesus had told them before that it was for their benefit (advantage) that he was going away, because he was going to prepare a place for them (John 14:2,28). He would give them the ability to do even greater works (John 14:12). He would give them deeper insight into the essential relationship between God the Father and God the Son (John 14:20). And he would come much closer to them than ever before, because he would not only be “with” them, but live “in” them through his Spirit (John 14:16,17,28)! Therefore his visible departure from his disciples was not a tragedy, but a great advantage and a triumph!

But before this could happen, Jesus still had to die on the cross and be resurrected in order to merit (acquire) the salvation of his people. Without meriting their salvation, there would be nothing to save them! Therefore Jesus Christ first had to die on the cross and had to be resurrected from the dead. After his ascension into heaven and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, Jesus would apply the merit of salvation to the hearts and lives of believers through the Holy Spirit!

Without departing from the disciples *in his visible and limited human nature*, there could be no return to them *in his invisible universal divine nature* as the Holy Spirit. At his birth, he had come in his visible human nature to the earth to reveal the invisible God to them and to make atonement for their sins. At the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, he would return to them on earth in his invisible divine nature (the Holy Spirit) to apply his completed work of salvation to the lives of believers all over the world and throughout history (cf. Romans chapter 8; Galatians 4:4-7)!

There is complete co-operation between God the Father, God the Son and God the Spirit in this work of salvation. God the Father sent the Spirit (John 14:26), God the Son sent the Spirit (John 15:26; 16:7) and the Spirit goes! The Spirit will have a tremendous effect on the world (John 16:8-11) and on the Church (Ephesians 2:22).

7. John 20:17. Ascended to have uninterrupted fellowship with his disciples.

Jesus Christ ascended into heaven to have uninterrupted fellowship with his disciples on earth.

Mary Magdalene became the first witness of the resurrection and the ascension. While a little later Jesus charged the other women to tell the disciples what had happened and that he would meet them in Galilee (Matthew 28:7), he charged Mary Magdalene to tell the disciples about the great event in the history of salvation that was about to take place, namely, the ascension into heaven!

Jesus prophesied that he was going to his Father in heaven and that therefore the believers could not continue to relate to Jesus as before. Before the death of Jesus, Mary Magdalene had experienced for a long time the daily visible association of Jesus with his disciples and the sweet fellowship with him. After the resurrection of Jesus from the dead she assumed that this former mode of fellowship was going to be resumed. So she clamped herself to his feet as an expression of worship, just as the other women did a little later (Matthew 28:9). Jesus did not object to her touching him, just as he later invited Thomas to touch him (John 20:27). But Jesus said to her that she must not and cannot continually hold on to him (cling to him) as if she could prevent him from leaving (to heaven).

The period of his day-to-day visible association with his disciples was over. He would appear visibly, now to this one, then to that one. That is why he said to her that she must not think that by holding him back she could keep him always with her. He was about to ascend to his Father in heaven. Then the former day-to-day relationship between Jesus and his followers on earth would not be continued in the same way. Instead of relating to Jesus in his physical body in one place on earth, they would relate to him through the Holy Spirit in every place on earth (cf. Romans 8:9-10; 2 Corinthians 3:16-18; John 14:16-18, 26; John 15:28; John 16:13-15)! Through the Spirit they would be able to have uninterrupted fellowship with Jesus! This fellowship would be far richer and more blessed, because it would be *the fellowship of the risen Lord* in heaven with his Church on earth!

On the other hand, Jesus emphasised *the distinction* between himself and his disciples. When Jesus said, “My Father and their Father” and “My God and their God” he clearly distinguished these two relationships:

- Jesus Christ is God’s Son *by nature* (in his Being) (metaphysically, ontologically) (John 1:1,18; John 10:30-33)
- Believers (Christians) are God’s sons (and daughters) *by adoption* (spiritually)(John 1:12-13; Ephesians 1:4-5).

Nevertheless, Jesus also stressed *the intimacy (closeness)* of their fellowship. In a spiritual sense, the God who is the Father of Jesus is also the God who is the Father of the disciples! It is to this God and Father that Jesus is ascending.

B. THE EVENTS AROUND THE ASCENSION OF JESUS CHRIST

1. The book of Acts views the ascension of Jesus Christ from an earthly point of view.

Read Acts 1:3-11; Luke 24:50-53.

After his resurrection from the dead, Jesus appeared to his disciples and other believers for a period of forty days. Once he ate with his disciples in Jerusalem. He said, “Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptised with water, but in a few days you will be baptised with the Holy Spirit ...” (Luke 24:50-53). “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses” among the Jews, the Samaritans and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:4-8).

Then Jesus was taken up before their very eyes. “A cloud hid him from their sight. Suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them and said: “Men of Galilee. Why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven.”

The notion that the body of Jesus Christ from then onwards became diffused or assumed divine properties so that it became omnipresent has no biblical ground at all. The glorified body of Jesus Christ was not a ghost, but a physical body (flesh and bones) that could be touched (Luke 24:37-40) and that could still eat food (Luke 24:41-43), but it was not “(sinful) flesh and (mortal) blood” (1 Corinthians 15:50). What the Bible teaches is the following:

- Jesus Christ was “snatched up to God and to his throne” (Revelation 12:5)
- He sat down at the right hand of God the Father (Mark 16:19; Ephesians 1:20)
- He would return in the same way as his disciples saw him ascend into heaven (Acts 1:11).

Then his disciples returned from the Mount of Olives to Jerusalem and remained in the upper room with other believers to pray (Acts 1:14). See Revelation 5:13, “Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, singing: “To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honour and glory and power, for ever and ever!”

2. The book of Revelation views the ascension of Jesus Christ from a heavenly point of view.

Read Revelation 5:1-13.

The theme of Revelation chapter 5 is: “God carries out his eternal plan through the Lamb who is in the centre of the throne”.

(1) **The message of the scroll in heaven (Revelation 5:1).**

There is A BOOK IN HEAVEN with God! It is a book in the form of a scroll. No religious book on earth is a copy of this book, because it is sealed. It is also not revealed to any prophet in history. There is only One in the history of this world who is worthy to break the seals and open the scroll! He is the only One able *to reveal* and *to execute* its contents! That Person is Jesus Christ, because only he died to make atonement for sins and only he was resurrected from the dead. Only he lives forever! All other prophets are still dead in their graves. Only he descended from heaven, only he was resurrected from the dead and only he ascended into heaven again.

The ascension and enthronement of Jesus Christ in heaven is *depicted symbolically* as the Lamb receiving the scroll out of the hand of God the Father on the throne.

The scroll with writing on both sides contains God’s decisions with regard to the history of the world and the history of the Church within the world. It contains the unsearchable plan or purpose of God that becomes historical events in the salvation history in “the end of the ages” (Hebrews 9:26; John 11:24), that is, during the whole New Testament period from the first coming of Christ to his second coming. These great and all-determining historical events that announce the coming of the kingdom of God are apocalyptic (grand and violent) events, because they reveal and execute God’s eternal plan of salvation (of his people) and judgement (of his enemies). God, who sits on his throne in the centre of the universe, carries out his eternal plan for this earth and its people through Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ reveals and executes God’s eternal plan of salvation and judgement.

This scroll has a completely different character than all other books on earth! The secular or religious books on earth record what events took place on earth in the past. They reveal the lives of certain secular or religious people, their words and their accomplishments and the wars they fought. But by opening and reading this scroll in heaven the events on earth are called into being and are set in motion! It does not reveal what already happened, but reveals what will happen soon (Revelation 1:3)! The moment Jesus Christ breaks a seal, the words of the scroll under that seal are revealed and the apocalyptic events begin to happen in history of man on the earth! “Opening” THE BOOK IN HEAVEN is a picture of Jesus Christ actually reigning over all events and people on earth from his first coming to his second coming.

What God did in creation, Jesus Christ does in revelation! By speaking a word at the creation God called the empirical (visible and measurable material) things that did not exist before into existence (Genesis 1:3; Psalm 33:6; Romans 4:17; Hebrews 11:3). And by opening the scroll Jesus Christ calls the events of the history of salvation and judgement written

in the scroll into existence! The moment Christ breaks one of the seals he causes its contents to be revealed and to be carried out (Revelation 6)!

(2) The message of breaking the seals of the scroll (Revelation 5:2-4).

For a long time no-one in the universe could be found that was worthy to open the scroll, reveal its contents and cause its contents to be set in motion. As long as the scroll remained closed, the created things and the historical events on earth stagnated and there was absolutely no progress!

If the scroll had remained sealed, a change in the situation and condition of the churches would not have been possible. The church in Ephesus would have continued being a dead orthodox church that holds on to the Christian truth, but lacks Christian love (Revelation 2:1-7). Likewise, the church of Sardes would have carried on being a church persecuted by other religions (Revelation 3:1-6). And the church of Laodicea would have carried on as usual being a church locked in deadly self-deception, threatened by materialism, affluence and worldliness (Revelation 3:14-22).

As long as the scroll remains sealed, the churches cannot be wiped out by oppression and persecution, but they also can not blossom up and bear fruit to their final glory! Then history on earth seems to have no end and the struggles of the Church do not seem to lead anywhere! Then the created things and the historical events do not grow towards their final destiny! The events on earth remain a circle in stead of a straight line to an ultimate destiny! This fact makes everything on earth very tiresome. There is no definite battle and there is also no definite victory! New reformations are followed by new deformations, worldliness and contamination! Times of revival are followed by times of grey and cold deadness. The Church experiences history as a time of flood (high tide) and a time of ebb (low tide). And the world regards history as an endless circle – everything is repeated over and over again. There seems to be no end to the hopeless events on earth².

As long as the scroll remains sealed, also Satan has no definite victory! He can persecute some believers unto death, but he cannot destroy them! He whips up nations to hate everything associated with Jesus Christ, but he does not succeed to wipe out the name of Jesus Christ! Also Satan and his associates experience history as a time of flood and a time of ebb.

Neither the Church nor Satan can break the seals of the scroll. Neither is able to gain the final victory! When the Church cannot see a definite end to this struggle on earth, she becomes discouraged and she feels utterly powerless. When there is no one able to break the seals of the scroll, the events on earth turn into an endless nightmare!

Why does the history of this world continually lie under the doom of indecision? Why is this monotony and endless circle of struggle never broken? We cannot answer this question, but realise that there are hidden mysteries in life (Deuteronomy 29:29; Isaiah 55:8-9) and that the history of this world is something more than a struggle for power! One cannot say that if God wills, he could defeat Satan and end this struggle, because also Satan has a certain legal position. Since the fall of man into sin, the evil world (the world without Christ) in a particular way has been subjected to Satan. “The whole world (without Christ) is under the control of the evil one” (1 John 5:19). Satan is called “the prince of this (evil) world” (John 12:31). He leads the whole (evil) world astray (Revelation 12:9). And he is called “the god of this age who has blinded the minds of the unbelievers” (2 Corinthians 4:4). That is why the events taking place on this earth are so puzzling, so bewildering and so terrifying. It seems as if the world is bewitched and the historical events lie in a ban of enchantment.

The events taking place on this earth can be brought to a definite end only by breaking the seals of this scroll! By breaking the seals and opening the scroll, Jesus Christ wipes all appearance and illusion away and causes everything in this world to become what they really are!

The leaders of this world always think in terms of their economic and military potential and power struggles. But God thinks in completely different terms!

(3) The message of the Lion, the Lamb and the Root (Revelation 5:5-7).

A mighty angel in a loud voice proclaimed, “Who is worthy to break the seals and open the scroll?” There is One who can open the scroll, but he does not do it right away. It is as if he waits to see whether any other being challenges him to take on this great work. But no one in heaven or on earth or in the world of spirits (demons) could open the scroll or even look into it. No demon, no mighty political king and no religious prophet in the history of this world stepped forward to open the scroll!

It is irrefutably clear that Jesus Christ (the Lion of Judah, the Root of David and the Lamb of God) is the only One that can break the seals and open the scroll (John 14:6; Acts 4:12; 1 Timothy 2:5)! Not one of the countless angels that serve God in heaven and not one of the four living creatures that represent God’s creation, but one of the elders representing the Church was given the privilege to proclaim the answer. John must know and feel that he is not standing alone, exiled on an island, faced with the many questions in history of this world. John is a part of God’s world-wide community of believers, the Church that received the Word. From that Word John may give the answers to the problems that daily face the Church. “The Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David has triumphed. He is able to open the scroll and its seven seals.”

² This is the view of Hinduism and Buddhism.

Jesus Christ is the Lion of God's people which is called "Judah" in the Old Testament (Genesis 49:10; Hebrews 7:14), "Israel" in the New Testament (Galatians 6:16) and "Church" (Greek: ekklesia) in both Testaments (Psalm 107:32; 2 Chronicles 29:28; Matthew 16:18). He is not "a lion" that conquers the world by the force of a worldly army or by religious "holy wars". His power lies in his radical submission. He is the Lion because he is the Lamb that gave himself to be slaughtered on the cross as the sacrifice of atonement for the sins of those in the world that accept him. None of the rulers of this age understood God's hidden wisdom, for if they had, they would not have crucified Christ (cf. 1 Corinthians 2:8). Also Jesus formulated this wisdom: "Unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds" (John 12:24).

Real greatness in the eyes of God is not the proud religious leader, or the fiery warrior and the invincible hero that conquers people and nations by his political-, legal- and religious plots and by the power of his money and army. The history of this world will not be brought to its final destiny by wars and terrorists, by oppression and persecution, or by bribery and religious lies. The history of this world will be completely unravelled and brought to its final glorious destiny (the new earth) by the One who, although he is God, emptied himself and took on the nature of Man. Then he humbled himself even more and submitted himself to be the Servant of man. Finally he submitted himself to the cross and became the Sacrificial Lamb that made atonement for sins (Philippians 2:5-8). Jesus Christ is the only Lion (the only King), because only he became the Lamb (the sacrifice of atonement)!

Jesus Christ is "the Root" and "the Offspring" of David (Revelation 22:16). The historical king David was king of God's Old Testament people. But prophecy throughout the Old Testament pointed to the real King, Jesus Christ, who would establish the real Kingdom of God and be the real King of all God's people in history. Jesus Christ is both the eternal Divine Origin (Root) of king David and at the same time his Human Offspring Descendent (Offspring) in time.

Jesus Christ is the only One in creation and in the history of man that can break both the mysterious enchantment of the events in the world and the illusion that everything and everyone is not what they in reality are. God gives the scroll only into the hands of Jesus Christ! In all other hands the scroll would become an object of idolatrous veneration and worship³.

(4) The message of the cross (Revelation 5:8-12).

The moment the scroll is given into the hands of Jesus Christ, the twenty four elders (who represent God's Church in heaven) and the four living creatures (who represent God's creation in heaven) fell down, not to worship the scroll, but to worship the One who is worthy to open the scroll! Christians do not venerate a Book in heaven, but worship the One who reveals and executes the contents of this Book! The Lamb is worthy to take the scroll and open its seals, because only he was slain and with his blood he purchased his people from every nation and every language (Revelation 5:9-10).

The death and resurrection of Jesus Christ at his first coming is the basis and centre of all human history (1 Corinthians 15:3-4; cf. Acts 1:22; 2:23-24; 3:13-15; 4:10; 5:30; 7:52-56; 8:32; 10:39-40; 13:28-31; 17:31; 26:23)! All powers in heaven, on earth and in hell are gathered around this one event in human history and fight for the outcome (Revelation 12:7-9; cf. 1 Corinthians 2:8; Colossians 2:15). Since creation all history pointed forward to the cross and resurrection. After Christ's first coming all history points back to the cross and resurrection and forward to Christ's second coming. At this one event in human history God and his Christ gained the decisive victory. At the cross Satan and his powers from hell and his followers on earth suffered their decisive defeat! At his first coming Christ bound the strong man Satan and established his kingdom. And he said: "He who is not with me is against me and he who does not gather with me scatters" (Matthew 12:28-30)! Every person must choose whether he is "with Jesus" or "against Jesus". There is no neutral ground!

The four living creatures, who represent the powers of nature, remind us of the darkness that came over the earth, the earthquake and the opening of graves (Matthew 27:45-53). God's creation realises that also its destiny is completely linked to this one day (the death and resurrection of Christ) and eagerly expects to be liberated from its bondage to decay and to be brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God (Romans 8:19-21)!

The twenty four elders, who represent God's Old Testament and New Testaments people in heaven), remind us of the people fearing and fleeing from the cross. God's people (the Church) see the fulfilment of the Law and the Prophets. The Law had taught the sacrifice of animals (Hebrews 9:12-14) and the Prophets had prophesied the Servant of the Lord who would be led as a lamb to the slaughter and who would be crushed for our sins (Isaiah 53:5,7). They all sing that Jesus Christ with his blood had purchased people from every tribe, language, people and nation (Revelation 5:9).

The angels in heaven always longed to catch a glimpse of the message of salvation that was entrusted to the Church (consisting of believers)(1 Peter 1:9-12). The angels announced the birth of Jesus Christ (Luke 1:26-37; 2:8-14). They served Jesus Christ (Matthew 4:11). They had strengthened Jesus Christ when he struggled in prayer shortly before he died (Luke 22:43). They had witnessed the terror of death, but also the joy of Easter when they lifted the stone from the tomb to reveal to people that Jesus Christ, who was dead, is alive for ever (Revelation 1:18; Matthew 28:5-7). They sing his praises. By the blood that was shed on the cross God reconciled to himself not only all things on earth, but also all

³ This is the view of Islam.

things in heaven (Colossians 1:19-20). The fall into sin had also affected the angels in heaven, but the world of angels is also saved from their kind of brokenness through the death of Christ on the cross.

(5) The message of the vision is about events from the very beginning to the present and onwards to the end of time (Revelation 5:13-14).

The vision in Revelation 4:1-11 speaks of the restful sitting of God on his throne in eternity. God is in the centre. But the vision in Revelation 5:1-12 speaks of the action of God through Christ in time. Now Christ is in the centre. The fullness of God dwells in Christ bodily and through Christ God reconciles everything in heaven and on earth to himself (Colossians 1:19-20; Ephesians 1:9-10).

The final vision in Revelation 5:13-14 speaks of the glory of him who sits on the throne and of the Lamb *forever and ever. Again God is in the centre,* but then it is God as He has revealed himself in Jesus Christ, his first coming, his sacrifice on the cross and his completed work of salvation (1 Corinthians 15:27-28)!

Before his first coming of Christ the things of this world seemed enchanted: the things in the world were not what they seemed to be. The things in the world did not seem to change. But after the death and resurrection, ascension and enthronement of Jesus Christ this enchantment has been broken. The things in the world become more and more what they really are. “Let him who does wrong continue to wrong; let him who is vile continue to be vile; let him who does right continue to do right; and let him who is holy continue to be holy” (Revelation 22:11). And the history of this world presses on towards its final destiny. It is Jesus Christ who reigns by breaking the seals and opening the scroll. This causes events in history to happen that would bring everything in creation to its final destination! The death and resurrection, ascension and enthronement of Jesus Christ at his first coming brought time and eternity together. At his second coming all things will be taken up into eternity.

“He made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfilment – *to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head* (Greek: *anakefalaiósasthai*), even Christ” (Ephesians 1:9-10; Hebrews 2:8). “At the Name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth, and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord” (Philippians 2:10-11). “That “God will reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven” (Colossians 1:20). *There is a difference in the way in which people will subject themselves to the sovereign rule of God!* The evildoers remain evil, but are forced to submit themselves! They do not welcome peace and harmony – these are enforced on them (see Romans 16:20; 1 Corinthians 15:24-28; Ephesians 1:21-22). The creation is willingly or unwillingly brought under the sovereign rule of the Head, Christ. Not in the sense of the teaching of universal atonement or universal salvation, because a part of humanity will remain enemies of God and his people (1 Corinthians 15:25) and also because “the eternal punishment” remains an eternal reality (Matthew 25:46; Revelation 21:8).

Therefore the whole created universe and all redeemed people praise God and the Lamb because of their work in creation and redemption. All things must ultimately glorify God (Romans 11:36). His will is being carried out in the universe (Revelation 4:11). The throne rules, that is, God the Father rules through God the Son. The Lamb reigns and therefore the Church need not fear its tribulations (trials and persecutions).

C. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE ASCENSION OF JESUS CHRIST FOR US

Jesus Christ is enthroned in heaven to reign over all and everything, thus establishing his kingdom in its final phase.

1. The first result of Christ's ascension into heaven is the proclamation of the complete triumph of Jesus Christ to the whole creation.

Read 1 Peter 3:18-22 (See manual 6, supplement 8. The relationship to the departed ancestors).

(1) The atonement of sins and the reconciliation of the broken relationship with God by Christ's death and resurrection (1 Peter 3:18).

Jesus was “put to death in the flesh” means that he was put to death while he still possessed his weakened human body, burdened with the sins of mankind (Romans 1:3). By his death, Jesus laid aside his weak human nature and severed every connection with sin and death.

Jesus was “made alive by the Spirit” means that his human body was made alive and resurrected from the dead by the Holy Spirit. After his resurrection, his whole body was glorified and completely controlled by the Holy Spirit (Romans 1:4; Colossians 2:9)! From that moment onwards Jesus, as to his human nature, no longer lived in his former lowly body, but in his glorified body in the power of the Holy Spirit. From that moment onwards God's incomparable great power put Jesus Christ at God's right hand above all authority, power and dominions and every title that can be given in the universe (Matthew 28:18; 1 Corinthians 15:25; Ephesians 1:20-23; Philippians 2:9-11; 1 Peter 3:22; Revelation 1:5).

(2) Christ's going and preaching (1 Peter 3:19).

The Greek text is clear: “In the Spirit he *once for all* (participle, aorist time) went somewhere and preached something.”

Note:

- His going was *not before* his resurrection, *but after* his resurrection!
- His going and proclaiming was *not in his human spirit, but in his glorified (resurrected) body!*
- His going was *not downwards to the underworld*, but upwards to heaven to the right hand of God where angels, authorities and powers are in submission to him (1 Peter 3:22)! Jesus did not go to the underworld (Hebrew: Sheol; Greek: Hades) where spirits of departed people reside, but to the world above, heaven, where God resides!
- His proclaiming was *not a preaching of the gospel, but a proclamation of his triumph!* His ascension into heaven itself was the proof of his ultimate victory and at the same time the contents of his proclamation.

(3) The spirits in prison (1 Peter 3:19).

The ascension of Jesus Christ was thus a once-only proclamation (of his triumph) directed to “to the spirits in prison”. These spirits were spirits (souls) of people in the past who disobeyed God when Noah built the ark. They died in the flood and their spirits (souls) are kept imprisoned in hell. Genesis 6:5 says that they were evil people and that every inclination of the thoughts of their heart was only evil all the time. 2 Peter 2:5 says that Noah was the preacher of righteousness. While Noah took God at his Word and obediently built the ark, these evil people mocked him and ridiculed his preaching and disregarded his warning. They did not believe in his preaching and disregarded his building of the ark, which for many years was a visible reminder of the coming judgement in the flood. They disobeyed God’s warning and resisted God’s patience for probably a hundred years long (1 Peter 3:20; Genesis 5:32; 6:3; 7:6). But when the flood came, Noah’s faith was proved right and the unbelief of the evil people was doomed (Hebrews 11:6). According to Matthew 24:37-39, Jesus Christ teaches that “the people in the days of Noah” are a symbol of all indifferent and disobedient people in the world!

Therefore, the ascension of Jesus Christ to heaven is a proclamation of victory over all the godless and unrighteous people, whether they lived before or after the first coming of Jesus Christ. From other passages in the Bible we know that Christ’s death, resurrection, ascension and enthronement is the proclamation of triumph over all the evil spiritual powers (Ephesians 1:20-22), like the devil and his demons (John 12:31-32; Revelation 12:5-9; 20:1,3,7), the evil spirits (fallen angels)(Luke 8:31; Colossians 2:15; 2 Peter 2:4; Jude 6; Revelation 9:1), all evil governments in the world (Psalm 2:8-12) and all godless and unrighteous people in the world (1 Peter 3:19)! Christ’s ascension to heaven is the proclamation of his complete triumph!

2. The second result of Christ's ascension into heaven is the exhibition of all his captives: on the one hand his saved people and on the other hand his enemies.

Read Ephesians 4:7-10; 2 Corinthians 2:14; Colossians 2:15.

The following Scripture passages make use of the picture of a Roman general entering Rome in a triumphal procession after his victory. He has won a battle and now celebrates his victory with a triumphal procession in the city. In his train he is followed by his war chariots, all his soldiers, the conquered people and all his captives. As he proceeds he gives gifts to the crowds that have come to cheer him.

The apostle Paul applies Psalm 68:18 in his letters. “When you ascended on high, you led captives in your train; you received gifts from men” In the Old Testament it is a symbol of God who gained a victory over one of the surrounding nations of Israel and then returns to heaven with prisoners and the spoils of war (gifts given to him). In the New Testament it is a symbol of Jesus Christ who after gaining the victory over Satan ascends triumphantly into heaven with captives in his trail and giving gifts to his people.

(1) The triumphal procession in Ephesians 4:7-8

“When he ascended on high, he led captives in his train and gave gifts to men.” When Christ ascended to heaven, he led all Christians as his *captives* in his triumphal procession. He captured or *won* them by his love, grace and truth as expressed in the gospel. The *triumphal procession* symbolises that Christ had conquered sin and death for his people on the cross and his triumphant ascension to heaven is a manifestation to the whole world of the Christians whom he had subdued by the power of his mercy and grace!

The gifts he gives are his grace (Greek: *charis*). He gives a portion of his grace to each Christian. The nature of the gifts may be the grace to do a special ministry, the grace to relate to a special group of people or the grace manifested in one of the many spiritual gifts. Thus each Christian must view his spiritual gift (Greek: *charisma*) not as the product of his own skill or ingenuity. He must view it as only one among many gifts and as limited in extent (a measured gift) and as something he must use (to build up other Christians, to build up the Church and to glorify God).

(2) The triumphal procession in 2 Corinthians 2:14-16

“Thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumphal procession in Christ and through us spreads everywhere the fragrance of the knowledge of him. For we are to God the aroma of Christ among those who are saved and those who are perishing. To the one we are the smell of death; to the other the fragrance of life.” All Christ’s captives here are Christians and as they follow Christ in his triumphal procession they spread the fragrance of the knowledge of Christ everywhere among people. For the people who believe in Christ the knowledge of Christ is a fragrance of life. But for the people who do not believe in Christ the knowledge of Christ is the smell of death.

(3) The triumphal procession in Colossians 2:15

“Having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.” Some of Christ’s captives are all the defeated forces of evil. They are paraded as *prisoners of war in chains* behind the chariot of Christ, the Victor, during his triumphant entry into heaven! They do not welcome the peace and harmony of Christ. It has to be enforced on them (Romans 16:20).

3. The third result of Christ’s ascension into heaven is that Christ is the permanent Representative of all Christians at the right hand of God the Father and the persistent Intercessor for Christians with God in heaven. Jesus Christ has become the Guarantee of a much better covenant than the old covenant of the law (Hebrews 7:22).

Read Hebrews 9:24-28; Hebrews 7:23-28; Romans 8:34; 1 John 2:1-2; Revelation 8:3-5.

(1) The Old Testament ceremonial cleansing symbolised the New Testament spiritual cleansing.

Hebrews 9:24 says: “Christ did not enter a man-made sanctuary (on earth) that was only a copy of the true sanctuary (in heaven). He entered heaven itself (at his ascension), now to appear in God’s presence for us.”

In Hebrews 9:23 the writer acknowledges that the rituals (of the Old Testament ceremonial law) in the earthly temple were real and effective for ceremonial cleansing of the earthly things, but denies that they were of any use for the removal of inward and spiritual defilement. Ritual cleansing was adequate for *the material order*, but a better sacrifice is necessary for effective purification *in the spiritual order*.

The Old Testament rituals were only *copies or shadows* of the New Testament realities. “The heavenly things” that required spiritual cleansing were the defiled consciences of people. That cleansing belonged to the spiritual sphere and not to the material sphere. The people of God needed inward spiritual cleansing so that they may approach God without defilement of sin and that they may be fit to dwell with God.

(2) The New Testament spiritual cleansing is effected by the blood of Jesus Christ.

By the death of Christ and thus by the sprinkling of his blood the people of God become “the house of God” (Hebrews 3:6; 2 Corinthians 6:16; Ephesians 2:22; 1 Peter 2:5). In order to be a spiritual house of this kind, they must have experienced regeneration and cleansing by “the sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 1:2,19,22f). In this way the following things are sanctified by the sprinkling of the blood of Christ:

- the book of the new covenant (the eternal gospel written in heaven) (Hebrews 9:20)
- the Christian sanctuary (the heavenly Jerusalem)(Hebrews 12:18-24)
- the Israel of God (the Christian Church who confesses the cross of Christ and whose members have been circumcised by the Holy Spirit (Galatians 6:16; Romans 2:28-29). They all have the stamp of Christ on them.

The Old Testament time of *preparation* was replaced by the New Testament time of *fulfilment*.

The work of salvation of Christ consists of:

- his completed sacrifice of atonement for sins on earth on the one hand
- and his high priesthood in the presence of God in heaven on the other hand

In Hebrews 9:24-26 the writer says that if sinners are to appear before God, even through the representation of a sinless high priest, they themselves must be cleansed from sin, otherwise the very presence of God would be polluted. Having finished his work of salvation through his death and resurrection on earth, Jesus Christ ascended into heaven right into the presence of God to be our eternal Representative with God.

He represents all Christians in heaven with God where his perfect sacrifice made atonement for them with God (1 John 2:1-2).

- While the priests during the Old Testament period entered the *earthly* temple every day to bring sacrifices, Jesus Christ entered the *heavenly* sanctuary *once for all time*.
- While the priests during the Old Testament period brought only *the blood of animals*, Jesus Christ *once for all time* brought (*shed*) *his own blood*.
- While the priests during the Old Testament period could only guarantee *ceremonial purity/holiness*, Jesus Christ *once for all time* guarantees permanent spiritual purity/holiness (forgiveness of the guilt of all sins and a conscience cleansed from all shame).

(3) The term “the last days” is the time of fulfilment.

“But now Christ has appeared once for all at the end of the ages (that is, at his first coming) to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself” (Hebrews 9:26). He dealt conclusively with sin! It is not that Christ happened to come at the time of fulfilment, but rather that his coming made that time “the time of fulfilment”! Christ’s first coming and his redemptive work inaugurated “the time of fulfilment”. “The last days” (the end of the ages) is the period between the first coming of Christ and his second coming.

The following events take place “in the last days” in the sense of the first coming of Christ:

- Jesus Christ was revealed “in these last times” (his birth)(1 Peter 1:20).
- God spoke to us “in these last days by his Son” (his life on earth)(Hebrews 1:1-2).

- Christ once for all did away with sin by the sacrifice of himself “at the end of the ages” (his crucifixion) (Hebrews 9:26).
- The Holy Spirit was poured out “in the last days” (his return in the Spirit)(Acts 2:17).

The following events take place “in the last days” in the sense of the second coming of Christ:

- The resurrection from the dead will take place “at the last day” (John 6:39,40).
- And the final judgement of people who reject the Word of Christ will take place “at the last day” (John 12:48)

Thus God’s *revelation* progresses from the creation up to the first coming of Jesus Christ. With the first coming of Christ God’s revelation has been completed! There is no further revelation beyond Jesus Christ! God spoke through Jesus Christ “in the end of these days” (“in the latter end of the days” or “in the end-time” or “ultimately”). In the Old Testament this phrase denotes the period of time in which the words of the Old Testament prophets would be fulfilled (Genesis 49:1; Deuteronomy 4:30; Isaiah 2:2; Jeremiah 30:24; Ezekiel 38:16; Daniel 10:14; Hosea 3:5; Micah 4:1).

(4) Jesus Christ is the only permanent High Priest.

There were two reasons why Jesus Christ fulfilled the Old Testament ceremonies.

- Jesus Christ was completely sinless (Hebrews 7:26,28). His sacrifice was not simply a picture or shadow of the reality, but the reality itself.
- Jesus Christ was resurrected from the dead and lives forever (Hebrews 7:23-24)! Therefore he is the permanent High Priest and has a permanent priesthood.

(5) Jesus Christ is the only Saviour and the only Intercessor.

Consequently there are two things which Jesus Christ can do which no other prophet or priest can do:

- Only Jesus Christ can save people from their sins. The apostles say, “Salvation is found in no one else. For there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12).
- Only Jesus Christ is the Mediator between people and God, who intercedes for us with God. Hebrews 7:25 says that Jesus Christ always lives to intercede for those who are saved.

(6) Jesus Christ is the only Mediator and One who perfects the prayers of Christians.

Revelation 8:3-5 teaches that much incense in heaven is mixed with the prayers of the saints on earth before they ascend up to God’s throne. As a result fire is thrown from heaven onto the earth.

- In Revelation 5:8 the incense symbolised “the prayers of the saints”.
- But in Revelation 8:3 the incense symbolises “the perfect prayers of Jesus Christ” at the right hand of God in heaven.

The prayers of the saints cannot rise to God by itself, because people are sinners and wrong cleaves to the prayers of even the most righteous among people. In order to please God, also the prayers of the saints need atonement! Their imperfect prayers are mixed with incense, which is given to the angel. The much incense represents Christ’s completed work of salvation (atonement) which he attained on the cross and which he applies through the Holy Spirit and his own intercessory prayers for his people. Thus, the much incense especially represents Christ’s continual and perfect intercession in heaven for Christians on earth, not least for his persecuted Church on earth (Romans 8:34; Hebrews 7:24-25; 9:24). The perfect prayers of Christ in heaven for us purify and sanctify our imperfect prayers on earth. The prayers of Christ remove every sinful motive and all selfishness from our prayers. The prayers of Christ for us cause our imperfect prayers to rise as completely perfect prayers to God!

4. The fourth result of Christ’s ascension into heaven is that Jesus Christ now reigns over all and everything on behalf of his Church. He calls the events in history into existence and set them in motion.

Read Romans 4:17; 1 Corinthians 15:25; Ephesians 1:20-22; Philippians 2:9-11; 1 Peter 2:22.

(1) Jesus Christ reigns over all and everything.

Romans 4:17 says, “God calls things that are not as though they were.”

1 Corinthians 15:25 says: “Jesus Christ must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet.”

Ephesians 1:20-22 says: “Christ is seated at God’s right hand in heaven far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age , but also in the age to come. God placed all things under Christ’s feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the Church.”

Philippians 2:9-11 says: “Therefore God exalted Christ to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on the earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

1 Peter 3:22 says: “Jesus Christ has gone into heaven and is at God’s right hand – with angels, authorities and powers in submission to him.”

Jesus Christ ascended into heaven and was enthroned at the right hand of God above every thinkable power in the universe and one the earth (Matthew 28:18). All angels in heaven, all evil spirits in the sky, all governments on earth are willingly or unwillingly subject to his sovereign reign. He is thus the Head of the whole universe and at the same time

the Head of the whole Church. He rules the universe in the interest of his Church! He rules in such a way that every event happening in the universe and in the history on earth serves the interests of the Church! The resurrected and enthroned Lord Jesus is the King of kings and the Lord of lords (Revelation 17:14)! Nothing happens on earth without his sovereign decision or permission. All those who do not submit to the triumph of his grace and salvation (his mercy and kindness), must one day submit to the triumph of his just judgement (his sternness) (cf. Romans 11:22)!

(2) Jesus Christ reveals the events in history with respect to his plan of salvation and judgment and sets them in motion.

God on his throne in the centre of the created universe executes his plan for the earth and its people through Jesus Christ. When Jesus Christ breaks a seal and opens that part of THE BOOK IN HEAVEN, he reveals the contents of God's plan of salvation and judgement and also sets it in motion. Nothing happens with you, your church or your country that does not have the decision or permission of God!

For example, Jesus Christ rides through the earth and conquers the hearts and lives of people through the preaching of the gospel of salvation (Revelation 6:1-2). But because of the fall into sin (Genesis 2:16-17) he allows that Christians are being persecuted and even slaughtered by their enemies (Revelation 6:3-4). He also allows that Christians (and other poor and weak people) are oppressed by the political, economic, military and judicial leaders (Revelation 6:5-6). And he allows that Christians as well as non-Christians die due to war, famine, epidemics and accidents (Ezekiel 14:21; Revelation 6:7-8).

Nevertheless, he rules over the universe and the earth in the interest of his Church (Ephesians 1:22; cf. Romans 8:28). He promised, "The gates of hell will not overcome the Church" (Matthew 16:18)! In the fullness of time he is occupied to bring all things on earth and in heaven under Christ (Ephesians 1:10; Colossians 1:19-20). Finally, every knee will bow willingly or unwillingly before Jesus Christ and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is the Lord!

5. The fifth result of Christ's ascension into heaven is that Jesus Christ is establishing the final phase of the kingdom of God in the universe by filling the universe with the reality and reign of God.

Read Psalm 68:18; Ephesians 1:9-10; Ephesians 4:9-10.

(1) The text in the Old Testament and in the New Testament.

The words in Psalm 68:18 in the Old Testament are *not quoted but applied* in Ephesians 4:8 in the New Testament. What the Psalm says about God in the Old Testament finds its fulfilment in Jesus Christ in the New Testament! Because the Author of the Old Testament and the New Testament is the same Spirit of Jesus Christ and because the Old Testament is best explained by the New Testament, the apostle Paul has the right to apply what the Old Testament says about God to Jesus Christ in the New Testament!

In the Old Testament God conquered his enemies on earth, received gifts (war booty) from the conquered people and ascended triumphantly to heaven with many captives in his train (taking many prisoners with him). But *in the New Testament* Jesus Christ conquered people by his death and resurrection on earth, gave gifts to his people on earth and ascended triumphantly to heaven with many of his conquered captives in his train.

As in 2 Corinthians 2:14 and in Ephesians 4:8, "the captives" are the Christians that have been conquered by his love, mercy (pity), grace (forgiveness) and truth (John 1:17). They are now following Jesus Christ in his triumphal procession! Jesus Christ received them as the spoils and prize for his completed work of salvation.

Jesus Christ received in order to give. He received these "captives" in order to give them to his kingdom to do kingdom-work on earth. In Ephesians 4:11 the apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds and teachers are the gifts that Christ gave to the worldwide Christian Church (but not necessarily to every local church) to equip Christians for their works of service and to build up the Body of Christ. These gifts are offices (appointed servants) rather than functions (services). Important is that these offices function under the leadership of the body of elders in every congregation (Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5; 1 Peter 5:1).

(2) The descent to the desert and his ascent to Paradise (Ephesians 4:9-10).

"The lower earthly regions" or better to "the regions lower than the earth" is contrasted with "the place higher than all the heavens". His descent to the earth is contrasted with his ascension into heaven. The apostle Paul in Ephesians 4:9-10 and the apostle Peter in 1 Peter 3:18-22 do NOT refer Jesus descending to a place (Hades or hell), but to a position (state) (lower than any man ever attained)! Jesus Christ did not descend to the underworld (or hell) to preach the gospel to the spirits of people that have already died, but descended to the earth in order to die on the cross! Although Jesus Christ was completely equal to God, he emptied himself of this glorious position (state), took on the fallen human nature of man, became the servant of all people, died on the cross as a criminal for the sins of people (Philippians 2:5-8) and was finally forsaken by God in his human nature (Matthew 27:46).

Therefore God exalted him to the highest position (state) in the universe, so that all knees would one day bend before him and all tongues would one day acknowledge that he is the King of kings and Lord of lords (Philippians 2:9-11; cf. 1 Peter 3:22). No one except Jesus Christ ever descended to the position of taking the sins of the world on himself (1 Peter 2:24) and of suffering the agonies of hell (Matthew 27:46)! But also no one except Jesus Christ ever rose to the

position of sitting on the right hand of God the Father, and from that position revealing and executing God's plan of salvation in the history of this world (Revelation 5:1-14)!

(3) The kingdom of God in its final phase.

The triumph of Jesus Christ will be complete when he has fulfilled the Old Testament revelation and the New Testament revelation and has filled (completed, perfected) the whole universe (Ephesians 4:9; Colossians 1:19-20). He will fill the Christian Church with all his fullness (Ephesians 1:23; cf. 2 Peter 1:4; 1 John 3:1-3). He will reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet (1 Corinthians 15:25). He will bring everything in heaven and on earth under Jesus Christ as Head (Ephesians 1:10). His kingdom will finally fill the whole universe (Daniel 2:44)! And his kingdom will be eternal (Isaiah 9:7; 2 Peter 1:11)!

6. The sixth result of Christ's ascension into heaven is that Christ has poured out the Holy Spirit as his representative on earth.

See manual 5, lesson 9.

5	PRAYER (8 minutes)	[REACTIONS] PRAYER IN RESPONSE TO GOD'S WORD
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Take turns in the group to pray short to God in response to what you have learned today.
Or divide the group into two's or three's and pray to God in response to what you have learned today.

6	PREPARATION (2 minutes)	[ASSIGNMENT] FOR NEXT LESSON
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(Group leader. Give the group members this preparation for at home in writing or let them copy it down).

1. Commitment. Be committed to make disciples and build Christ's Church.
2. Preach, teach or study the teaching of "Ascension - commemorating the enthronement of Christ" together with another person or group of people.
3. Personal time with God. Have a quiet time from half a chapter of **1 Corinthians 9 - 12** each day. Make use of the favourite truth method. Make notes.
4. Memorisation. Meditate and memorise the new Bible verse, (2) **John 1:16**. Daily review the last 5 memorised Bible verses.
5. Bible study. Prepare the next Bible study at home. **John 2**. Make use of the five steps method of Bible study.
6. Prayer. Pray for someone or something specific this week and see what God is doing (Psalm 5:3).
7. Update your notebook on building Christ's Church. Include your notes on quiet time with God, your memorisation notes, your teaching notes and this preparation.