

**THE MEANING
BEHIND
THE MANNER**

**A COVENANT UNDERSTANDING
OF THE ASCENSION OF CHRIST**

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from the NASB version.

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DEDICATED:

To all who will choose scripture over tradition and engage in the battle for the restoration of biblical [covenant] eschatology, thank you.

“Holding fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching, so that he will be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict.”
Titus 1:9

FORWARD

In any discussion of eschatology and the nature of the coming of the Lord, Acts 1 and the promise that Christ would come “in like manner” is seen as definitive proof that at some point in the future, Jesus will descend from heaven as a 5’5” Jewish man, in a physical body, riding on a cloud, as the entire cosmos is totally annihilated. These verses are touted as the final refutation of what is known as Covenant Eschatology, or “Full Preterism”; the view that all prophecies stand fulfilled.

In this excellent book, Dan Dery sets forth to answer - head on and with full force - this mistaken interpretation of Acts 1. Dery shows that if (*when*, as most do) the reader is unaware of, or ignores, the covenantal context of the language and the motifs of Acts 1, that this inexorably leads to a total misapplication of the angel’s promise. Similarly, when one either ignores or discounts the OT prophetic background and source of Acts 1, confusion is the result. And, when one fails to consider the inter-textual connections between Acts 1 and many other OT and NT texts that irrefutably delimit and define both the nature and the time for the Parousia of Christ in fulfillment of Acts 1, that an entirely false eschatology is created.

As someone that has always been - and still am - a strong believer in comparative charts, let me say that you will truly appreciate Dery’s charts that show the perfect parallels between Acts 1 and some key OT and NT eschatological prophecies. These are prophecies that indisputably posit the coming of the Lord in the judgment of Old Covenant Israel in AD 70.

A fascinating and important aspect of Dery’s examination of Acts 1 is Luke’s use of sacerdotal, priestly, language in regard to Jesus’ actions as he prepared to ascend. When one considers

this language and imagery Acts 1 will be seen in a totally new light. Finally, Dery shows that you cannot divorce the prediction of Acts 1 from the other NT prophecies of the Lord's final coming from the multitudinous time statements that demand a first century fulfillment. As Milton Terry noted many years ago:

“Whatever the real nature of the parousia, as contemplated in this prophetic discourse, our Lord unmistakably associates it with the destruction of the temple and city, which he represents as the signal termination of the pre-Messianic age. The coming on clouds, the darkening of the heavens, the collapse of elements, are, as we have shown above, familiar forms of apocalyptic language, appropriated from the Hebrew prophets... “To make the one statement of the angel in Acts 1:11, override all the sayings of Jesus on the same subject and control their meaning is a very one-sided method of biblical interpretation. But all the angel's words necessarily mean is that as Jesus has ascended into heaven so he will come from heaven. And this main thought agrees with the language of Jesus and the prophets.” (Milton Terry (1898) *Biblical Apocalypics: A Study of the Most Notable Revelations of God and of Christ*; Grand Rapids; Baker Book House; pp. 246-247).

If you desire to look deeper into the Acts 1 ascension event, perhaps in a way that you have never considered; I highly recommend this book. I assure you that you will be amazed at the wealth of information, the careful exegesis, and the force of the logic found herein.

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**AN INTRODUCTION
TO
THE ASCENSION**

It is my opinion that if we are to grasp the prophetic and covenant significance of the Acts 1 ascension of Christ, the ascension event itself must first be seen and understood within its immediate kingdom and covenant-context. Allow me to explain. At both the close of his first account and the beginning of his second, Luke tells us that for forty days the risen Christ spoke to his innermost circle of disciples, the twelve, of “the things concerning the kingdom of God”; and that he “opened their minds” that they might understand the Old Testament scriptures.

Luke 24:36-40,44-45

While they were telling these things, He Himself stood in their midst and said to them, “Peace be to you.”

But they were startled and frightened and thought that they were seeing a spirit.

And He said to them, “Why are you troubled, and why do doubts arise in your hearts?”

See My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself; touch Me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have.”

And when He had said this, He showed them His hands and His feet.

Now He said to them, “These are My words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, *that all things which are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled*”.

Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures.

Acts 1:1-3

The first account I composed, Theophilus, about all that Jesus began to do and teach,

until the day when He was taken up to heaven after He had by the Holy Spirit given orders to the apostles whom He had chosen.

To these He also presented Himself alive after His suffering, by many convincing proofs, *appearing to them over a period of forty days and speaking of the things concerning the kingdom of God.*

As the Lucan accounts continue, we gain indispensable insight into what Jesus taught during this time concerning the nature of the kingdom, and how his newly enlightened disciples understood it.

Luke 24:49

“And behold, I am sending forth the promise of My Father upon you; but you are to stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high.”

Acts 1:4-5

Gathering them together, He commanded them not to leave Jerusalem, but to *wait for what the Father had promised, “Which,” He said, “you heard of from Me;*

for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.”

In response to this promise, the disciples immediately asked;

Acts 1:6

“.... Lord, is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?”

Now, regardless of how and to what extent the disciples understood the nature of the kingdom at this point,¹ their response should never surprise us. After all, the promise of the Spirit in the Old Testament scriptures is consistently connected to the eschatological kingdom-restoration of Israel.² And remember, Jesus had just spent forty days “speaking of the things concerning the kingdom of God” out of the Old Testament scriptures. Therefore, in the context of the sending of the Spirit their question was completely appropriate. Below are just two out of many possible Old Testament passages that the disciples would have immediately considered upon hearing the words, “*you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit*”. Notice the first:

Isaiah 32:15

Until the Spirit is poured out upon us from on high, and the wilderness becomes a fertile field, and the fertile field is considered as a forest.

In Luke 24:49, the sending forth of the Spirit to “clothe them” with “power from on high”, was a direct allusion to this prophecy of Isaiah concerning the restoration of Israel. In its original historical context, this pouring out of the Spirit probably referred to the spiritual [covenantal] although temporal restoration [reform] of the kingdom of Judah under the reign of the righteous king Josiah.³ Meaning, that through the “pouring out” of his power and mercy, God blessed his people through a king [Josiah] who reigned “righteously and justly”,⁴ who “did right in the sight of the Lord, and walked in all the ways of his father David”.⁵ In this way, Israel experienced a typological restoration through the Spirit of

God; when the “wilderness became a fertile field” and the “people lived in a peaceful habitation.”⁶

However, as Luke records, Jesus applied the true eschatological fulfillment of this passage to the pouring out of the Spirit upon the apostles on the day of Pentecost, *a direct result of his ascension.*⁷ Thus for Jesus, the pouring out of the Spirit on Pentecost, was a definitive sign to Israel that their kingdom-restoration [in fulfillment of the prophets] which he himself had initiated⁸ was continuing in and through the ministry of his apostles. Below is the second Old Testament passage:

Ezekiel 37:1,11,21-28

The hand of the Lord was upon me, and He brought me out by the Spirit of the Lord and set me down in the middle of the valley; and it was full of bones.

Then He said to me, “Son of man, *these bones are the whole house of Israel*; behold, they say, ‘Our bones are dried up and our hope has perished. We are completely cut off.’

“Say to them, ‘Thus says the Lord God, “Behold, I will take the sons of Israel from among the nations where they have gone, and I will gather them from every side and bring them into their own land;

and I will make them one nation in the land, on the mountains of Israel; and one king will be king for all of them; and they will no longer be two nations and no longer be divided into two kingdoms.

“They will no longer defile themselves with their idols, or with their detestable things, or

with any of their transgressions; but I will deliver them from all their dwelling places in which they have sinned, and will cleanse them. And they will be My people and I will be their God.

“My servant David will be king over them, and they will all have one shepherd; and they will walk in My ordinances and keep My statutes and observe them.

“They will live on the land that I gave to Jacob My servant, in which your fathers lived; and they will live on it, they, and their sons and their sons’ sons, forever; and David My servant will be their prince forever.

“I will make a covenant of peace with them; it will be an everlasting covenant with them. And I will place them and multiply them, and will set My sanctuary in their midst forever.

“My dwelling place also will be with them; and I will be their God, and they will be My people.

“And the nations will know that I am the Lord who sanctifies Israel, when My sanctuary is in their midst forever.”

As all students of scripture are aware, one of the most primary Old Testament prophecies concerning the restoration of the kingdom of Israel through the pouring out of the Spirit, is Ezekiel 37. Thus, it would be blindness in the extreme on our part to miss or deny that the disciples had Ezekiel’s prophecy in mind when in the context of the coming of the Spirit they inquire; *“Lord, is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?”*

Based on this prophetic background, what we see then in the immediate context of the Acts 1 ascension of Christ is the reiteration of the age-old promise to pour out the Spirit that “all Israel” [the whole house] might be gathered together as the dwelling place of God, in which the blessings and inheritance promised to the fathers might be fulfilled.

Although portions of Ezekiel’s prophecy no doubt found typological fulfillment in the post-exilic return of the southern kingdom from Babylon to the land of Judah under Ezra and Nehemiah; the entire prophecy was from the beginning Messianic; and pointed to the covenant and kingdom-restoration of Israel under Jesus the Christ. It was through the everlasting new covenant of peace⁹ that Jesus the Shepherd-King¹⁰ had poured out the Spirit upon Israel,¹¹ to gather together both kingdoms as one nation in the land,¹² that the sanctuary [the temple] of God might be established in their midst forever.¹³ Undeniably, Ezekiel’s prophecy was in the process of being fulfilled in Christ through the forming of the church during the last days of the Jewish age, between approximately 30-70AD.¹⁴

At this point you may be asking, and rightly so; how does all this relate to the ascension of Christ? More specifically; how does the immediate context of the Acts 1 ascension [specifically the restoration of the kingdom to Israel in fulfillment of Ezekiel 37] relate to the ascension event itself? In answer to that question, notice just three of the *covenant-elements* found in Ezekiel 37.¹⁵

- The *covenant-presence* of God [Ezekiel 37:14,23]
- The *temple* [sanctuary] of God [Ezekiel 37:26-28]
- The *blessings* [fulfillment of the promises] of God [Ezekiel 37:25-26]

Now, consider the following:

-According to Ezekiel 37, the restoration of the kingdom to Israel would involve [1] the return of the covenant-presence of Yahweh, [2] the establishment of the Messianic temple, and [3] the blessings of the promises made to the fathers *applied* to the New Covenant people of God.

-But, the restoration of the kingdom of Israel as foretold in Ezekiel 37 forms the background and context for the Acts 1 ascension event.

-Therefore, we conclude that the Acts 1 ascension of Christ in some way concerns and relates to the restoration of the kingdom to Israel for [1] the return of the covenant-presence of Yahweh, [2] the establishment of the Messianic temple, and [3] the blessings of the promises made to the fathers applied to the New Covenant people of God, in fulfillment of Ezekiel 37.

As we shall presently demonstrate, this was precisely the message that the combined apostolic records of the ascension communicated to the first century disciples. *The visible ascension of Jesus served to reveal and confirm the invisible covenant-realities that had at that time begun, and would in that same generation be fully consummated at the revelation of Jesus Christ.* Having established this kingdom and covenant context, we invite you to reason together with us as we seek to unveil the “*meaning behind the manner*” through a covenant understanding of the ascension of Christ.

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1. It seems unreasonable to me that after having their minds “opened” by the Lord himself for forty days to “understand the scriptures”, specifically, the “things concerning the kingdom of God”; that the disciples would still at this point be confused concerning the true and spiritual nature of the kingdom. The fact that they did understand the kingdom as a spiritual rule and dominion becomes evident in the very next chapter [Acts 2], where Peter preaches the rule and reign of Christ [his kingdom] as a then-present reality in

fulfillment of Psalms 2 and Psalms 110. Thus, although the apostles did struggle with certain nuances of the kingdom [such as Jew and Gentile issues - Galatians 2, Acts 15], they clearly did not struggle in their understanding of its spiritual/heavenly nature [Acts 2, 13, 15, Galatians 3-4, 1 and 2 Peter etc.]

2. For example, see Isaiah 32:15, 44:3, Ezekiel 36:26-27, 37:14, Joel 2:28-29, and Zechariah 12:10 in their immediate contexts.
3. 2 Kings 22:1-23:25
4. Isaiah 32:1
5. 2 Kings 22:2, 23:25
6. Isaiah 32:15,18
7. John 7:39, 14:1-3,16-17, 16:7
8. Luke 7:22 in fulfillment of Isaiah 35, Luke 4:17-19 in fulfillment of Isaiah 61:1f
9. Hebrews 13:20 in fulfillment of Ezekiel 37:26
10. John 10:11, John 1:49, 12:13 in fulfillment of Ezekiel 37:24-25.
11. John 20:22, Acts 2:1-36 in fulfillment of Ezekiel 37:5,9-10,14 [and Joel 2:28-32]
12. Matthew 24:31, John 11:52, Ephesians 2:13-18 in fulfillment of Ezekiel 37:11,21-22. It is significant that the kingdom-restoration of Israel foretold in Ezekiel was to be in “their own land”, to “the land that I gave to Jacob my servant, in which your fathers lived” [Ezekiel 37:21,25]. The fact that according to Jesus and the apostles, Ezekiel’s kingdom-restoration was taking place in their days means that “the land” [Palestine] was being apostolically interpreted to be “spiritual” [covenantal] and not geographical. This definitively defines the restoration of the kingdom to Israel in Acts 1 as “spiritual” [covenantal] and not “natural” [geographical]. Our premillennial brethren have clearly misunderstood the nature of the kingdom of God.
13. 2 Corinthians 6:16, Ephesians 2:19-22, 1 Peter 2:4-5 in fulfillment of Ezekiel 37:26-28
14. Acts 2:16-21, Hebrews 1:1-2, 9:26, 1 Peter 1:20

15. Ezekiel 36 could have been included in this discussion, but for the sake of brevity we have refrained. Likewise, there are many more than three covenant-elements found in Ezekiel 36-37, but again, for the sake of brevity and simplicity we have limited it to three.
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