

The exaltation of Christ

After thirty-seven years of living in humble circumstances, the exaltation of Christ began with his resurrection, followed by his enthronement in heaven at the Father's right hand. On this very day Jesus was begotten of God (Ps 2:7), born into a new relationship with him, whereby he was called Son of God and given authority, glory, and sovereign power (Dan 7:14). In this way, he was appointed by God to be his regent over the nations of the world.

Forty days after his resurrection, Jesus ascended physically to heaven in the presence of his disciples whom he commissioned to make disciples of all nations. As heir of the kingdom that God will establish on Earth, he presently waits until that time when God will make his enemies a footstool for his feet (Ps 110:1, Heb 10:13).

At his return to Earth in power and glory, he will resurrect and rapture his Church and be glorified in them as his bride; his monarchy who will reign with him. He will defeat his enemies at Armageddon and begin his reign over the Earth. This increase in rank and power is best understood as occurring in six events:

1. His **resurrection** from the dead Matt 28:6, 1 Cor 15:20, Col 1:18, Rev 1:5
2. His **enthronement** in heaven Ps 110:1, Eph 1:20-21, Dan 7:13-14
3. His **ascension** to heaven Matt 28:19-20, Luke 24:50-51, Acts 1:9
(with 2000-year wait in heaven Acts 3:20-21, Heb 10:13)

4. His **return** to Earth in power and glory Matt 24:30-31, 1 Thess 4:14-17, 2 Thess 1:7
(with descent to Israel Matt 24:30, Zech 14:3-4, Rev 1:7)
5. His **enthronement** on Earth Dan 7:18, 22, 27, Ezek 43:4-7, Mat 19:28,
2 Thess 1:10, Rev 11:15-17, 19:6
6. His **glorification** in the saints 2 Thess 1:10, John 17:10, Rev 21:2, 22:3-4
7. His 1000-year **reign** Zech 14:9, 1 Cor 15:25, Rev 20:4-6
(and subjection to the Father 1 Cor 15:24-25, 28)

1. His resurrection from the dead

God raised Christ from the dead. Not only did he come back to life after being dead, but he rose from the dead in an immortal, supernatural body. Christ was the first person to have a resurrection body. When he returns to earth, those who belong to him will be resurrected and raptured with these bodies that are glorious, powerful, and spiritual, that is, they are filled with the Spirit of God. Jesus' appearances on earth for forty days after his resurrection illustrate how these bodies are capable of normal human activities but also can disappear and reappear. Just as we have born the image of the earthly man, so shall we bear the image of the heavenly man. Paul states that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, which implies that the kingdom has not yet been inaugurated. We are presently only heirs of the kingdom and co-heirs with Christ. Resurrection bodies enable Christ and his people to live in both physical and spiritual environments. It is an exalted mode of life.

2. His enthronement in heaven

Arriving in heaven, the Father told Jesus to sit at his right hand until he made his enemies a footstool for his feet (Ps 110:1). God seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realm, where he exercises sovereignty over heaven and earth, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion (Eph 1:20-21). This is where Jesus is now, reigning as God together with the Father. Their present reign is in the spiritual realm, it is not the Messianic reign, or kingdom of God,

that Jesus spoke so much about. David continues: The Lord (Messiah) is at your right hand, he will crush kings on the day of his wrath. He will judge the nations, heaping up the dead and crushing the rulers of the whole earth (Ps 110:5-6). This is the battle of Armageddon, the next great visitation of Christ on earth.

Shortly before his ascension to heaven, Jesus gave his disciples the Great Commission saying: "All authority in heaven and earth has been given to me, therefore go and make disciples of all nations" (Mat 28:18). Jesus had already told them he would build his church and the gates of Hades would not overcome it. This was his great purpose, and it is now the church's responsibility to preach the gospel to all peoples, tribes, language groups, and nations. When the saints are resurrected, Jesus will be glorified in them and admired by them.

The investiture of the Son of Man as God's regent on earth is the subject of the parable of the minas (Lk 19:11-27) that Jesus told. The crowds supposed that the kingdom of God was imminent, but Jesus told the parable to warn them that it would take some time. He said a certain man of noble birth went to a distant country to have himself appointed king, and then to return. When he returned, he called his servants to account, rewarding those who had done well and punishing those who didn't. The nobleman is Jesus, his servants are his followers, and his return was not imminent, it is now approaching 2000 years since his ascension.

3. His Ascension to Heaven

Forty days after his resurrection, Jesus ascended to heaven from the Mount of Olives in the presence of his disciples. He rose from the earth until a cloud hid him from their eyes. Two angels told them that he would come back in the same way that they had seen him going into heaven. He will also return to the same place, the Mount of Olives (Zech 14:4).

His 2000-year Wait in Heaven

Jesus' enthronement in heaven is necessary because he is God the Son, but it is not the climax of his exaltation. He is waiting there for his enemies to be made his footstool before he descends to earth to rule it directly. Preaching in Jerusalem, Peter told his fellow Israelites that God would send the appointed Messiah, even Jesus, but heaven must receive him until the time comes for God to restore everything. Sitting on the throne in heaven he waits until that time when his enemies will be made his footstool (Heb 10:13). The time for him to defeat the kingdom of the world and establish his kingdom has not arrived yet. That is in the days of the kings of the fourth kingdom (Dan 2:44).

4. His Return to Earth in Power and Glory

Daniel saw a vision of a son of man coming with the clouds (7:13), what Jesus called 'the sign of the Son of Man in the sky' (Mat 24:30). The surrounding context in Daniel refers to Antichrist at the end of the age (7:8, 11, 20-21, 24-26). The Lord Jesus will be revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels. He will return physically, just as his disciples saw him ascending to heaven. He will bring with him the spirits of those who died in union with him, and their bodies will be resurrected from their graves. At the same time, the living saints will be raptured and meet the Lord in the air. Expressed differently by John, the New Jerusalem will descend from heaven to the earth's atmosphere, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. The bride, now resurrected and raptured, meets the Lord in the air in their heavenly home, the New Jerusalem. A great multitude cries out: Hallelujah! For our Lord God Almighty reigns. The wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready.

5. His Enthronement on Earth

Zechariah clearly states that on the day of the Lord, his feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, east of Jerusalem, and the mountain will be split in two from east to west. In a vision of the same event, Ezekiel saw the glory of the God of Israel coming from the east. His voice was like the roar of rushing waters, and the land was radiant with his glory. The glory of the Lord entered the temple through the gate facing east and his glory filled the temple. Jesus said, all the tribes of the land will mourn when they see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. In Revelation, John saw Jesus coming with the clouds and said, every eye will see him, even (or namely) those who pierced him, and all the tribes of the land will mourn because of him. Zechariah also describes his coming. Israel will look at the one they pierced, and the whole land will mourn, clan by clan. The Lord pours out a spirit of grace and supplication on them, and a fountain is opened to cleanse them from sin and impurity. All Israel is saved as it is written: The Deliverer will come from Zion, and he will turn godlessness away from Jacob. And this is my covenant with them when I take away their sins (Rom 11:26). They will be his people on earth during the millennium. God's throne in heaven is to be distinguished from the throne of David of which the angel Gabriel spoke to Mary saying: "The Lord God will give your son Jesus the throne of his father David, and he will reign over Jacob's descendants forever, his kingdom will never end." This is the kingdom of God of which Jesus continually spoke; the Messiah's kingdom with his throne in Jerusalem. At the renewal of all things the Son of Man will sit on his glorious throne judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

6. The 1000-year reign

The Lord will be king over the whole earth and he alone will be worshipped. He will strike down the nations at Armageddon with a sharp sword that comes out of his mouth, and he will rule the survivors with an iron scepter, The saints will reign with Christ for 1000 years (Rev 20). The throne of God and the Lamb will be in the city (New Jerusalem) and his servants will serve him and they will reign forever and ever. The earth is not eternal, so any reference to reigning on earth forever means while the earth exists. Christ will reign until all enemies are subdued, including death, after which he will hand over his kingship to God the Father. He is never depicted as being visible on earth during this long reign and neither are the saints.

At the sounding of the seventh trumpet in Revelation, the kingdom of the world becomes the kingdom of the Lord and his Messiah and he will reign forever. The Messiah does not reign alone. All believers, in their Spirit-filled resurrection bodies, are clothed in fine linen, bright and clean, which stands for the righteous acts of God's people. The Messiah has returned to be glorified by his saints and to be admired by all his believers. They are united to their Lord and share his authority. Daniel 7:13-14 is about the Messiah, and verses 15-27 are about the saints of the Most High, better translated as the saints of the high places or the saints of the heavenly realm (compare Eph 1:3, 2:6). It is they who receive the kingdom and possess it forever. "The sovereignty, power, and greatness of all the kingdoms under heaven will be handed over to the saints of the high places. Their kingdom will be an everlasting kingdom, and all rulers will serve and obey them." The saints' role during the millennium is to eat and drink at the king's table, reign over the earth, judge Israel, the world, and angels, and be in charge of all the Messiah's possessions. Our Lord, the King, will oversee everything.

His subjection to the Father

At the end of the millennium, Satan is cast into hell and the wicked are judged at the Last Judgment. Death and Hades cease to exist as Hades has no inhabitants and only immortal beings remain. As the world has come to an end, the Son relinquishes his kingship, so that God the Father may be all in all.

