

Our Lord's Ascension.

No. Six

In the mid 1960s the British Anglican bishop A.T. Robinson wrote a book entitled *Honest to God*, which was applauded by liberals and criticized by others. Bishop Robinson objected to the notion that heaven is up there somewhere, because he felt that modern cosmology has shown that we can no longer believe in a hell down below and in a heaven up above. This narrow-minded rationalist believed that in our space age the very idea of ascension is primitive. But Robinson and others who object to the Biblical doctrine of our Lord's ascension to heaven on the basis of a Copernican cosmology miss the point altogether. The crude idea that Jesus like an astronaut flew past all the stars and planets to reach His destination is absurd. Heaven cannot be searched by astronomers. The ascension of our Lord is a historical fact and not a myth. Our Lord is now "above the stars." The Incarnation refers to Jesus' descent from heaven. The ascension was its reversal. Jesus returned to His former home to be with His Father. We don't know where heaven is located. We do know that it is beyond this earth and human comprehension and imagination. Wherever heaven is, it is a real place where the Lord Jesus Christ is in His glorified body. Our Lord predicted His ascension. In the Gospel of John He used such expressions as "I go to the one who sent me" (7:33) and to be "glorified" (7:39). In Acts, Luke spoke twice about our Lord having been taken into heaven (1: 9,11). Stephen, the first martyr, saw "heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God" (Acts 7: 56). Hebrews speaks of Jesus as "now crowned with glory and honor" (2: 9).

The ascension is a crucial redemptive fact. If the Lord had not ascended, the Holy Spirit could not have come to move the Church. "Exalted to the right hand of God, he has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear" (Acts 2 " 33; cf. John 16: 7). Heaven is now the center of activity. Jesus is Lord now. He went to heaven to receive all authority over creation and the church (Matth.28: 18; Eph.5: 22). In the midst of all the trials and tribulations, we can have peace within, knowing that all things are in the control of Him who does all things well (Rom.8: 28).

There is also an intimate relationship between our Lord's ascension and His second coming (Acts 1: 11). The ascended Lord will return in majesty and glory to earth to judge the living and the dead and to claim the redeemed. Maranatha! Come, Lord Jesus! (Rev.22: 20).