

Proverbs 30, John 3 & Ephesians 4

Who Hath Ascended and Descended?

Scripture Readings

“Who hath ascended up into heaven, or descended?... What is his name, and what is his son’s name, if thou canst tell?” — Proverbs 30:4

“No man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of Man which is in heaven.” — John 3:13

“He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things.” — Ephesians 4:10

“I know thy works. Behold, I have set before thee an open door, no man can shut it. For thou hast a little strength, and hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name.” — Revelation 3:8

Proverbs 30 — Pure Questions Without Answers

Agur the son of Jakeh, the man who wrote Proverbs 30, begins with a striking confession: he is more brutish than any man, has not the understanding of a man, has neither learned wisdom nor had the knowledge of the Holy. He has questions — not answers. And those questions have been preserved for us in the Scriptures, for every word of God is pure. They are better questions than most of what fills the world, because the world’s questions are without God, and therefore without answers. God has the answers, and the Bible has the answers.

The first and most searching of Agur’s questions is this: “Who hath ascended up into heaven, or descended? Who hath gathered the wind in his fists? Who hath

bound the waters in a garment? Who hath established all the ends of the earth? What is his name, and what is his son's name, if thou canst tell?" The word "who" is the key. He is thinking about a person. If anyone has ever ascended into heaven, or if anyone has ever come down from heaven, that would be one of the most significant facts in all of history, from creation to the present day.

Enoch and Elijah — The Question Remains Open

One might point to Enoch: Genesis 5 records that he walked with God, and he was not, for God took him. But God took him — the power came from God, not from Enoch himself ascending in the power of his own person. Then there is Elijah, taken up in a whirlwind to heaven. Again, the power of the whirlwind was required. The question "who hath ascended?" remains unanswered by either of them. Someone who ascended by his own right and power and nature — who is that?

John 3:13 — The One Who Came Down First

In John 3 the Lord Jesus is speaking with Nicodemus. He has said, "Ye must be born again." That which is born of the flesh cannot pass through the barrier between earth and heaven. But then comes verse 13: "And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of Man which is in heaven." Here is the answer to Agur's question. The only one who ascends to heaven is the one who first came down. And the last clause — "which is in heaven" — is one of the most striking statements in all of John's Gospel. The Lord said this while He was on earth. He was on earth and in heaven simultaneously. He was not limited by the incarnation. There is no place where He is not.

There is another thing to notice in this verse: the Lord speaks of His ascension as already accomplished, before it had happened in time. How can He say that? He

could say it because He could step outside of time and speak from eternity. That which the Father determined before the foundation of the world, the finished work of redemption, He could declare as done, because in the counsel of God it was done. So in John 17:4, before the cross: “I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do.” These are not errors or exaggerations. They are the speech of the eternal Son, for whom past, present, and future are equally known and equally real.

The Descent — Philippians 2

Philippians 2 reveals the cost of that descent. He who subsisted in the form of God — a plain assertion of His essential, eternal deity — did not treat equality with God as something to grasp for His own advantage. He emptied Himself. He took the form of a bondservant. He was found in the likeness of men. He humbled Himself and became obedient unto death — even the death of the cross. That is the full range of the descent: from the form of God to the cross. And God’s answer to that obedience is the highest exaltation: a name which is above every name, at which every knee shall bow.

Ephesians 4 — Far Above All Heavens

Ephesians 4 traces the full extent of both movements. “When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive and gave gifts unto men. Now that he ascended, what is it but that he also descended first into the lower parts of the earth? He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things.” The range is total. The lower parts of the earth — Golgotha, the grave, the very deepest point of human sin and death — to far above all heavens: above the atmospheric heavens, above the starry heavens, above the dwelling of God itself. Not merely “into” heaven, but far above them all. And the one who went there is the same one who came down here. He is the answer to Agur’s question.

And His ascension is not only His own. Ephesians 2:6 tells us that God has raised us up together with Christ and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus. When He led captivity captive, He took His own with Him in principle. Our bodies await the resurrection, but already, in our standing before God, we are seated where He is seated. He ascended and brought us with Him.

The Light That Descended — Isaiah

Israel was given light: “Come ye, and let us walk in the light of the Lord” (Isaiah 2:5). And in prospect: “Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee” (Isaiah 60:1). These were real gifts — the law, the prophets, the covenants. But while He is there at the right hand of the Father, He has not left us without light. He has sent down from heaven something greater than Israel ever received.

A Light Above the Brightness of the Sun — Acts 9, 22, 26

The conversion of Saul of Tarsus is recorded three times in the book of Acts, and each account describes the light that came from heaven in terms that build in intensity. In Acts 9: “suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven.” In Acts 22: “suddenly there shone from heaven a great light round about me.” In Acts 26: “at midday, O king, I saw in the way a light from heaven, above the brightness of the sun, shining round about me.” A light — a great light — a light above the brightness of the sun.

A threefold witness is not easily broken. The threefold progressive description of this one event is not repetition; it is unveiling. The sun is the greatest natural light we know. What has been given to us in the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ surpasses it absolutely. This is the light of Christianity — a light that has descended from heaven for us.

1 Corinthians 2 — Hidden Wisdom Revealed by the Spirit

“We speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the world unto our glory, which none of the princes of this world knew. For had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.” The light that came down from heaven, this wisdom hidden since before the world was made, was kept from those who would have rejected it. It was reserved for those who love God. And it has been communicated not by human wisdom or natural understanding, but by the Spirit: “God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit. For the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God.” We have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit of God, that we might know the things freely given to us of God.

Revelation 3:8 — A Little Strength, His Word, His Name

“Behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it. For thou hast a little strength, and hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name.” This is the Lord’s assessment of a small, faithful company in a day of weakness and ruin. Not great resources, not impressive numbers — a little strength. But they have kept His word and have not denied His name. His word is a light to our path. He has given it so that, if nothing else, we might have a little strength, keep His word, and not deny His name. This is what the light of Christianity has been given for. May the Lord give us to walk in the good of that morning light.

“He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things.” — Ephesians 4:10