

“THERE’S A MAN IN THE GLORY”: THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE ASCENSION OF JESUS

BY RON KANGAS

“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to God” (Col. 3:16).

According to this verse, hymns can be used in and for teaching the rich contents of the divine revelation in the Scriptures. Two outstanding hymns convey profound truths regarding the ascension of Christ. The first, composed by Witness Lee, is a marvelous portrayal of Jesus in His exaltation. The first two stanzas declare,

Lo! in heaven Jesus sitting, / Christ the Lord is there enthroned; / As the man by God exalted, / With God’s glory He is crowned.

He hath put on human nature, / Died according to God’s plan, / Resurrected with a body, / And ascended as a man. (*Hymns*, #132)

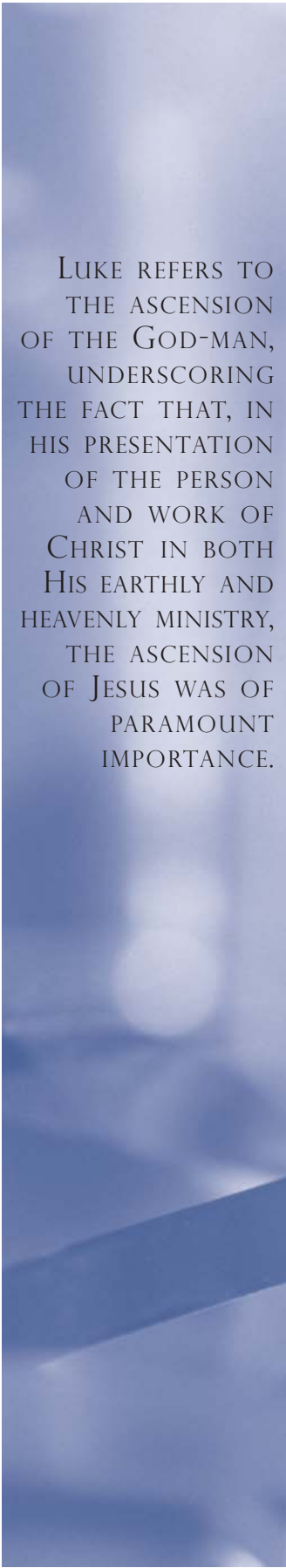
The man Jesus has been exalted by God to the highest position in the universe, where, crowned with God’s glory, He sits enthroned as Christ. This One, who put on human nature, did not set it aside after His redemptive death and victorious resurrection. On the contrary, in and with His resurrected body, He “ascended as a man.” This view of Jesus in His ascension is unveiled more fully in the last stanza: “Lo! a man is now in heaven / As the Lord of all enthroned; / This is Jesus Christ our Savior, With God’s glory ever crowned!” (ibid).

A man—Jesus the Nazarene (Acts 22:8; 26:9)—has been enthroned as Lord of the entire universe, including every person, matter, thing, and situation. In relation to those who believe in Him and who are one with Him, He is “Jesus Christ our Savior.” This God-exalted man will be crowned with God’s glory eternally, indicating that the humanity that the Son of God put on through incarnation and that was glorified in His resurrection will forever be a part of His person as the firstborn Son.

The other hymn that praises the ascended Lord Jesus was written by Mary E. McDonough, the author of the classic book *God’s Plan of Redemption*. As the uplifted utterance reveals, this hymn impresses upon us the fact that there is a glorified man whose life as the first God-man is for us to experience and enjoy:

There’s a Man in the glory / Whose Life is for me. / He’s pure and He’s holy, / Triumphant and free. / He’s wise and He’s loving, / How tender is He! / His Life in the glory, / My life must be; / His Life in the glory, / My life must be.

There’s a Man in the glory / Whose Life is for me. / He overcame Satan; / From bondage



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He's free. / In Life He is reigning; / How kingly is He! / His Life in the glory, / My life must be; / His Life in the glory, / My life must be.

There's a Man in the glory / Whose Life is for me. / His peace is abiding; / How patient is He! / He's joyful and radiant, / Expecting to see / His Life in the glory / Lived out in me; / His Life in the glory / Lived out in me. (*Hymns*, #505)

Here we have not only a vision of the man in the glory, the ascended and exalted Jesus, but also an experiential testimony that the divine-human life of this glorified God-man is for us. The glorified Jesus, who is reigning in life (Rom. 5:17), is holy, triumphant, free, wise, loving, tender, and kingly, and He fully expects to see His life in the glory becoming our life and being lived out in us. Because of this expectation, the man in the glory is joyful and radiant.

These two outstanding hymns introduce the subject of this essay: the significance of the ascension of Jesus, who is the man in the glory. The focus here is not on the heavenly ministry of the ascended Lord with His many offices but on the person of this man Himself and on the amazing fact that, in and through ascension, He has been exalted to be the Lord of all, the Ruler of the universe. We need to see what kind of man has been given a name above every name and is the Head over all things.

The Ascension of Jesus in Luke

In the Gospel of Luke the ascension of Jesus is explicitly described in chapter 24 and referred to in chapter 9. "As the days were being fulfilled for Him to be taken up, He steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem" (v. 51). The expression *taken up* does not refer to the Lord's death on the cross or to His resurrection but to His ascension, as indicated by Paul's utterance *taken up in glory* (1 Tim. 3:16). For the Lord Jesus to "steadfastly set His face" means that He was determined to go to Jerusalem, and the ultimate goal of His unshakable resolve was His being "taken up" in ascension as a man for the fulfillment of God's purpose. That Luke refers, or alludes, to the ascension of the God-man underscores the fact that, in his presentation of the person and work of Christ in both His earthly and heavenly ministry, the ascension of Jesus was of paramount importance. Luke wanted to convey the thought that as Jesus was set to go to Jerusalem, His aim was to pass through death, enter into resurrection, and then be "taken up" into heaven.

At the time of the Lord's being taken up in ascension, "He led them [the disciples] out as far as Bethany, and He lifted up His hands and blessed them. And while He blessed them, He parted from them and was carried up into heaven" (Luke 24:50-51). Luke is describing an actual and observable physical event. Although he, like the apostle Paul, did not witness the Lord's being taken up, he had "carefully investigated all things from the first" (1:3), the things concerning the matters which had been fully accomplished among the believers (v. 1) and had been "delivered" to the second generation of believers by "eyewitnesses" (v. 2), those who had been with Jesus during His ministry on earth. Peter, one of these eyewitnesses, had a clear understanding of the significance of the event narrated in Luke 24:50-51, for he later refers to the ascended "Jesus Christ, who is at the right hand of God, having gone into heaven, angels and authorities and powers being subjected to Him" (1 Pet. 3:21-22). Mark, whom Peter regarded as his son (5:13), ends his Gospel by saying, "So then the Lord Jesus, after speaking to them, was taken up into heaven and sat at the right hand of God. And they [the disciples] went out and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them" (16:19-20).

According to Luke 24:52 and 53, the apostles were not despondent over the Lord's departing from them but were filled with joy and rejoicing: "They worshipped Him

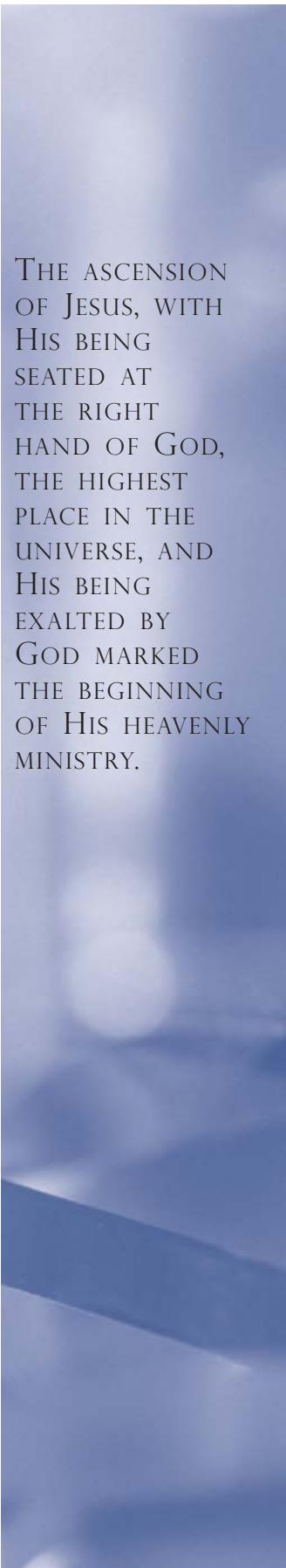
and returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and were continually in the temple, blessing God.” That they worshipped the Lord Jesus demonstrates that He, the God-man, was in His deity truly worthy of worship. What caused the apostles not only to worship the resurrected and ascended Lord Jesus but to return to Jerusalem with “great joy,” continually “blessing God”? It is likely that their joy was related to their spiritual realization and understanding, gained after the resurrection of Jesus. When He manifested Himself to them with a resurrected body of flesh and bones, showing them His hands and His feet (vv. 39-40), “they still did not believe for joy and were marveling” (v. 41). The Lord proceeded to tell them that “all the things written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and Psalms” concerning Him had to be fulfilled (v. 44). “Then He opened their mind to understand the Scriptures; and He said to them, Thus it is written, that the Christ would suffer and rise up from the dead on the third day” (vv. 45-46). As a result, they were able to understand the things concerning His person and work that they could not perceive prior to His appearing in resurrection. From the account in Acts 1, the Lord remained with them for a period of forty days, presenting Himself alive “by many irrefutable proofs” and teaching them many things (v. 3). The great joy that filled them when Jesus was taken up seems to suggest, if not reveal, that they had begun to understand what He had accomplished in His ministry on earth and what, as the ascended One, He would carry out in His heavenly ministry. Continually, they were blessing God, speaking well of Him and praising Him.

The context of Luke 24 shows that the ascension of Jesus is related to two crucial matters—the gospel and the Spirit. Jesus said to the disciples, “Repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed...to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem” (v. 47). Under the administration of the ascended Jesus, the believers would proclaim as the gospel repentance and forgiveness of sins. The Gospel of Luke emphasizes forgiveness of sins. While He was on the cross, Jesus prayed, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing” (23:34). This precious word embodies the spirit of this Gospel (cf. 7:47). The good news regarding the forgiveness of sins could be proclaimed only when the Savior’s vicarious death for our sins had been accomplished and confirmed by His resurrection. To proclaim repentance for the forgiveness of sins requires the Spirit of power received from the ascended Christ through the baptism in the Holy Spirit. Because the believers were to be “witnesses of these things” (24:48), the Lord Jesus went on to say, “Behold, I send forth the promise of My Father upon you; but as for you, stay in the city until you put on power from on high” (v. 49). After saying this, He led them out as far as Bethany and blessed them (v. 50), and “while He blessed them, He parted from them and was carried up into heaven” (v. 51). With joy, they would proclaim forgiveness of sins, being clothed with the power of the Spirit, and “the man in the glory” would give life to all who believe in Him and call upon His name.

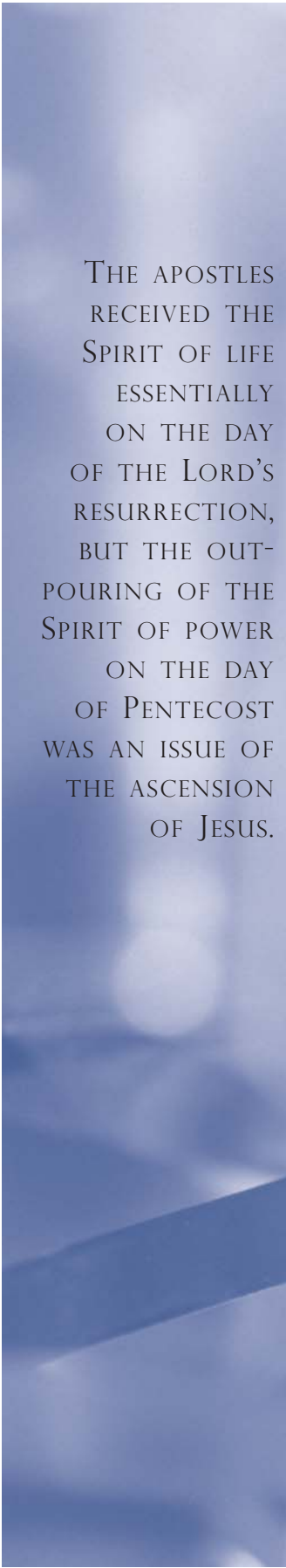
The Ascension of Jesus in Acts

Luke ends his Gospel with Jesus ascending into heaven, and he begins Acts with an account of Jesus ascending into heaven. This indicates that a great transition in the ministry of Jesus was about to take place. The Gospel of Luke records His ministry on earth, testifying of the Lord’s incarnation, birth, living, work, ministry, crucifixion, and resurrection, all of which took place during the stage of Christ’s earthly ministry. The ascension of Jesus, with His being seated at the right hand of God, the highest place in the universe, and His being exalted by God marked the beginning of His heavenly ministry. The Gospel of Luke describes how the disciples followed the Lord in His earthly ministry; the book of Acts records the activities of the apostles and the believers as they cooperated with the ascended Jesus in His heavenly ministry.

The ascension is the central matter in chapter 1 of Acts. Twice Luke speaks of Christ’s



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being “taken up” (vv. 2, 11). Verse 2 refers to “the day on which He [Jesus] was taken up after He had given commandment through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom He chose.” After His resurrection and before His ascension, the Lord Jesus met with the apostles, giving them further training and direction. Regarding the need for one to replace Judas in “this ministry” (v. 17), Peter said, “It is necessary therefore that of the men who accompanied us all the time in which the Lord Jesus went in and went out among us, beginning from the baptism of John until the day on which He was taken up from us, one of these should become a witness of His resurrection with us” (vv. 21-22). The one who filled “the place of this ministry and apostleship, from which Judas turned aside” (v. 25), had to be an eyewitness of the ascension of Jesus narrated in this chapter.

To the apostles the Lord Jesus “presented Himself alive after His suffering by many irrefutable proofs, appearing to them through a period of forty days” (v. 3). The resurrected Christ promised His disciples that He would be with them “all the days until the consummation of the age” (Matt. 28:20). In His frequent appearing during the period of forty days, He trained them to believe in and to experience His invisible presence, deeply impressing this upon them so that they could live and serve Him faithfully after He was no longer present with them in a physical, visible, and tangible way. As He met together with them and charged them to “wait for the promise of the Father” (Acts 1:4), He said, “You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and unto the uttermost part of the earth” (v. 8). Although the apostles received the Spirit of life essentially on the day of the Lord’s resurrection (John 20:22), in Acts 1 they had not yet received the Spirit of power economically. The outpouring of the Spirit of power was an issue of the ascension of Jesus and took place on the day of Pentecost. After the forty days during which the Lord appeared to the apostles, training them and charging them to be His witnesses, He was “taken up.”

“When He had said these things, while they were looking on, He was lifted up, and a cloud took Him away from their sight” (v. 9). This was, in the words of Luke 24:51, the Lord’s parting from them and His being carried up into heaven, where He carries out His heavenly ministry through the believers as described in the book of Acts. This was an actual, observable event. The apostles were “looking on” as “He was lifted up.” Acts 1:10 and 11 continue the narrative: “While they were looking intently into heaven as He went, behold, two men in white clothing stood beside them, who also said, Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you beheld Him going into heaven.” “This Jesus” ascended visibly with a body from Mount Olivet, and He will return visibly with a body to Mount Olivet (Zech. 14:4). The apostles looked upon Him as He was being taken up by a cloud, and those on earth at the time of His return will see Him coming on a cloud (Matt. 24:30).

In Acts 1 the apostles were eyewitnesses of the ascension of Jesus and were profoundly affected by what they saw. In his first gospel message Peter proclaimed the reality of the Lord’s ascension when he said, “This Jesus God has raised up, of which we all are witnesses. Therefore having been exalted to the right hand of God and having received the promise of the Holy Spirit from the Father, He has poured out this which you both see and hear” (2:32-33). The following is an enlightening word regarding the effect of seeing Jesus being taken up:

This vision of Christ’s ascension into heaven strengthened the disciples’ faith in Him and in what He had done for them through His death and resurrection. It broadened their view of God’s heavenly economy, which had brought them into cooperation with Christ’s ministry in the heavens for the carrying out of God’s New Testament economy on the

earth. The believers should have such a vision concerning Christ's ascension. (Lee, Recovery Version, 1:11, note 5)

The Ascended Jesus as the Son of Man

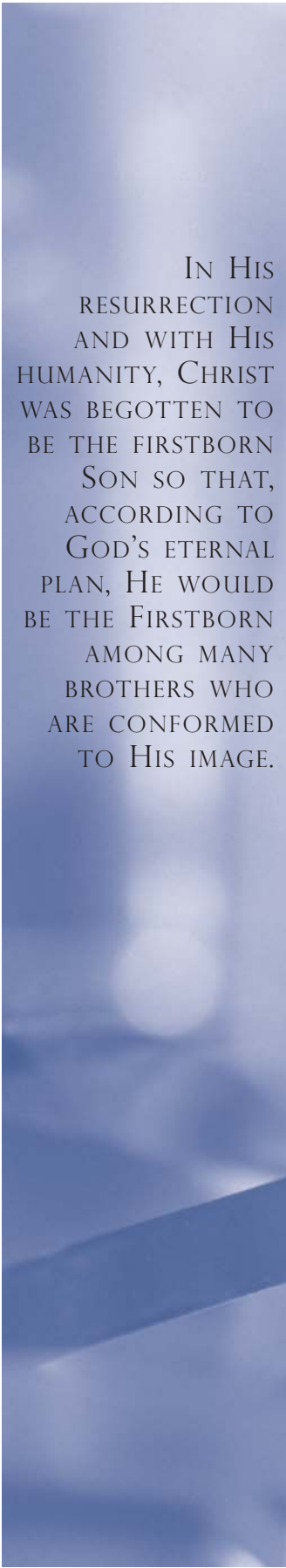
"When the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman" (Gal. 4:4). "God sent His only begotten Son into the world that we might have life and live through Him" (1 John 4:9). God sent "His own Son in the likeness of the flesh of sin and concerning sin," condemning sin in the flesh (Rom. 8:3). Through incarnation the only begotten Son was born as a man—the Son of Man, with the genuine human nature and virtues. To be sure, the One born of a woman was the Son of God. The angel said to Mary, "You will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call His name Jesus. He will be great and will be called Son of the Most High" (Luke 1:31-32). When Mary asked how this could be, the angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore also the holy thing which is born will be called the Son of God" (v. 35). Jesus is the Son of God, the complete God manifested in the flesh, yet He is also a man, a perfect man expressing the divine attributes in His human virtues. Repeatedly, the Gospel of Luke refers to Jesus as the Son of Man: "The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath" (6:5). "The Son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised" (9:22). Referring to His second coming, the Lord Himself said, "The Son of Man...comes in His glory and the glory of the Father and of the holy angels" (v. 26). "You also, be ready, because at a hour when you do not expect it, the Son of Man is coming" (12:40). "Even as it happened in the days of Noah, so will it also be in the days of the Son of Man" (17:26). "When the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth?" (18:8). "The Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which is lost" (19:10). "They will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory" (21:27). "Be watchful at every time, beseeching that you would prevail to escape all these things which are about to happen and stand before the Son of Man" (v. 36). "From now on the Son of Man will be seated at the right hand of the power of God" (22:69). From verses such as these, we see that Jesus was the Son of Man in His incarnation, human living, and crucifixion, that He is now the Son of Man in ascension at the right hand of God, and that He will be the Son of Man when He comes again in glory:

The Lord was the Son of Man on the earth before His crucifixion, has been the Son of Man in the heavens at the right hand of God since His resurrection (Acts 7:56), and will be the Son of Man even at His coming back on the clouds. To accomplish God's purpose and to establish the kingdom of the heavens, the Lord had to be a man. Without man, God's purpose could not be carried out on earth. (Lee, Recovery Version, Matt. 26:64, note 1)

Central to the significance of the ascension of Jesus, the man in the glory, is that in His ascension He is still the Son of Man. This means that the Christ who is in the heavens still has His humanity; He continues to possess His human nature with all the human virtues. This is proved by what Stephen saw and declared in Acts 7:55-56: "Being full of the Holy Spirit, he looked intently into heaven and saw the glory of God and Jesus standing at the right hand of God; and he said, Behold, I see the heavens opened up and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God." The fact that Stephen saw the ascended Jesus as the Son of Man proves that in ascension the Lord Jesus is still the Son of Man with His humanity. This repudiates the erroneous assertion that Christ eventually put off His human nature and now is no longer a man. In ascension Christ continues to be both the Son of God with divinity and the Son of Man with humanity. As the Son of Man with humanity, He is "the man by God exalted."

This Jesus, the glorified and ascended Son of Man, is the One who is at the right hand

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of God. In Romans 8:34 Paul speaks of "Christ Jesus who died and rather, who was raised, who is also at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us." The expression *the right hand of God* signifies preeminence, the first position of honor. The right hand of God is the highest position in the universe, and the ascended Jesus has been placed in this position by God. God the Father has given the preeminence and the highest honor to Jesus in His ascension. Furthermore, this Jesus, the Son of Man, has been crowned with glory and honor (Heb. 2:9). In His suffering of death, Jesus was crowned with thorns, but in His ascension at the right hand of God, He is crowned with glory and honor. As the ascended One crowned with glory and honor, the Lord Jesus is in a state of glory.

The Ascended Jesus as the Firstborn Son

The ascended Jesus is the firstborn Son of God. When the Lord Jesus came through incarnation, He came as the only begotten Son of God. God sent His only begotten Son into the world for our salvation. Thus, in His first coming Jesus was the only begotten Son of God; however, in His second coming He will appear as the firstborn Son when God "brings again the Firstborn into the inhabited earth" (1:6). When Christ was brought by God to the earth the first time, He came in His status as the only begotten Son and became the Son of Man. When Christ is brought by God to the inhabited earth the second time, He will come not in His status as the only begotten Son but in His status as the firstborn Son of God—a status in which He is both the Son of God and the Son of Man. This requires a careful study of the New Testament, which reveals that Christ, the only begotten Son of God, became the firstborn Son of God in resurrection.

Regarding the Son of God, there are two aspects: the aspect of the only begotten Son and the aspect of the firstborn Son. "No one has ever seen God; the only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him" (John 1:18). Christ Jesus was the only begotten Son in eternity. In the eternal, immutable Godhead, the Son is the unique, only begotten Son. Through incarnation God sent His only begotten Son into the world so that those who believe into Him may receive eternal life in Him (3:16; 1 John 4:9; 5:11-12). When God sent Christ to the earth, Christ was still the only begotten Son of God. Although Christ remains the only begotten Son eternally in the unchanging Godhead, in His resurrection and with His humanity, He was born, begotten, to be the firstborn Son so that, according to God's eternal plan, He would be the Firstborn among many brothers who are conformed to His image (Rom. 8:29). Romans 1:3 and 4 say, "Concerning His Son, who came out of the seed of David according to the flesh, who was designated the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness out of the resurrection of the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord." These verses, along with 8:29, indicate that Christ in His resurrection was begotten to be the firstborn Son in resurrection. The humanity put on by Christ through incarnation was, in His resurrection, uplifted into His divinity, causing Jesus to become the Son of God in a second sense—the Son of God with both divinity and humanity. As the only begotten Son, the Lord Jesus had divinity without humanity, but in His resurrection Jesus became the firstborn Son of God, possessing not only divinity but also humanity. The humanity that He put on through incarnation was uplifted—divinized and "sonized"—in resurrection. From that time onward and for eternity, Christ Jesus will be both the only begotten Son of God and the firstborn Son of God. The One who is in ascension as the Son of Man is the ascended firstborn Son. At the beginning of the coming age of the kingdom, Jesus, the Son of Man who is the firstborn Son in ascension, will return to the earth as the Firstborn, accompanied by His overcoming warrior-bride.

The distinction between Christ being the only begotten Son of God and His being the firstborn Son of God is crucial. Christ is the only begotten Son from eternity to

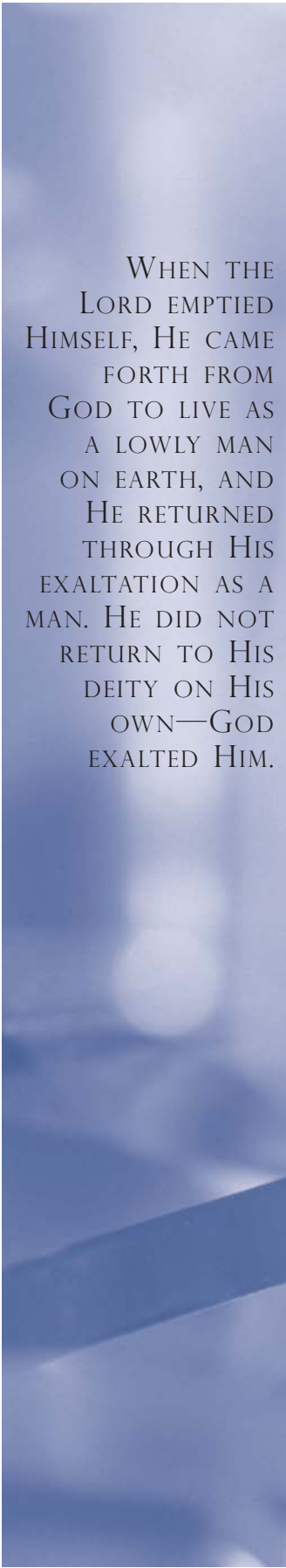
eternity, but He became the firstborn Son through His resurrection and will continue to be the firstborn Son forever. His status as the firstborn Son will last eternally (John 1:51; Acts 7:56; Rev. 1:13). Jesus, the firstborn Son, resurrected with His humanity, ascended with His humanity, enthroned with His humanity, will come again with His humanity, and will have His humanity eternally. In ascension Jesus is the Son of Man and the firstborn Son, yet His status as the only begotten Son cannot be jeopardized or altered, for He is eternally the only begotten Son in the immutable Godhead. In the eternal Godhead, He is the only begotten Son with divinity; in His resurrection and ascension, He is the firstborn Son with both divinity and humanity. The Son of God and the Son of Man, the only begotten Son and the firstborn Son, are actually one person, the one unique God-man (Lee, *Collected Works* 257-259).

Jesus in Ascension as the God-exalted One Receiving the Name Which Is above Every Name

Philippians 2:5-11 is a tremendous revelation of the incarnation, human living, crucifixion, and exaltation of the Lord Jesus, with a particular emphasis on His being obedient unto death and His exaltation. Although Christ existed in the form of God, He “did not consider being equal with God a treasure to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a slave, becoming in the likeness of men” (vv. 6-7). This was God becoming a lowly human being, even assuming the form and position of a slave, for He came not to be served but to serve. “Being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself, becoming obedient even unto death, and that the death of a cross” (v. 8). Although He was the Word, God, becoming flesh (John 1:1, 14), He came in the likeness of the flesh of sin and yet did not know sin with its essential elements of lawlessness, disobedience, and rebellion (Rom. 8:3; 1 John 3:4; 2 Cor. 5:21). He was the only human being who was absolutely obedient to God, doing the will of the Father and seeking the Father’s glory. Jesus humbled Himself to the uttermost, taking the lowest position, but God exalted Him to the highest position in the universe. God “highly exalted Him and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name” (Phil. 2:9). In ascension Jesus is the God-exalted One, who has received the name which is above every name. The name mentioned in verse 9 is the name referred to in verses 10 and 11: “That in the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should openly confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.” The time is coming when those on every level of the universe—heaven, earth, and under the earth—will bow their knees and openly confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. In His ascension the man Jesus was made the Lord by God, and every tongue must confess that this exalted One is Lord.

In the chapter entitled “The Son’s Submission” in *Authority and Submission*, Watchman Nee presents a marvelous view of the obedience and exaltation of the Lord Jesus as revealed in Philippians 2:5-11, a most divine portion of the Word. What follows is a summary and limited explication of certain marvelous insights. Nee points out that first, Christ emptied Himself and then humbled Himself. In the Godhead the Lord voluntarily chose to do this and to submit Himself to the authority of the Father. “The Father became the representation of authority, and the Son became the representation of submission” (42). In His obedient living on earth as a God-man, Christ established submission and thus represents submission. Concerning His deity, the Lord was equal with God, but His being the Lord was given to Him by God as a result of His obedience unto death. His deity is based on what He is in His eternal being, but His attaining to the position of Lord is based on His living as the Son of Man on earth. When the Lord Jesus “laid aside His divine form to fully maintain the principle of submission and subsequently ascended to the heavens, God accorded to Him the position of Lord. Based on Himself, He is God. Based on His attainment, He is Lord” (43). In the fullness of time, the Son willingly emptied Himself to become a man as

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EXALTED HIM.

the representation of submission, because only through a submissive man could authority be established. Although the birth of Jesus was the coming forth of God, Jesus, as the Son of Man, took on human restrictions, even the restrictions of a slave. Once the Lord laid aside the form of God and became a man, there was a serious question: In what way would He return to God—would it be solely by living as a man who was obedient unto death, even a death of a cross, or would it be by using the authority of His divinity to burst His way out of the flesh and return to His position in the Godhead simply as the Son of God with divinity alone? Here is Watchman Nee's understanding of these two options and the Lord's choice:

When the Lord stepped out [of His deity], there were only two ways for Him to return. One was to be a proper man, absolutely and unreservedly submitting with no trace of rebellion, being obedient step by step, and letting God bring Him back and set Him up as Lord. If being a slave had been too difficult for Him, if weakness and the limitations of the flesh had been too much for Him, and if submission had been beyond Him, the only other way to return would have been for Him to force His way back by using the authority and glory of His deity. But our Lord rejected this way, a way which He was not meant to take. He set His heart to subject Himself to the way of submission even unto death. Since He emptied Himself, He could no longer refill Himself. He did not vacillate in His mind. Since He emptied Himself of all divine glory and authority and stepped forth as a slave, He did not want to go back by any other way than the way of submission. Before He returned, He completed His course of being obedient unto death in the position of a man. He was able to return because He accomplished a perfect and pure submission. Suffering upon suffering was piled on Him, but He remained absolutely submissive. There was not the slightest reaction or rebellion. Therefore, God exalted Him and ushered Him back as Lord in the Godhead. This was not just a refilling what had been emptied but the ushering of a *man* into the Godhead by the Father. The Son became Jesus (the man) and was received back into the Godhead. Now we know the preciousness of the name of Jesus. In the whole universe there is no one like Him. (44-45)

From this we perceive that when the Lord emptied Himself and came forth from God to live as a lowly man on earth, He did not intend to return through His deity. Rather, He intended to return—and He did return—through His exaltation as a man. He did not return to His deity on His own—God exalted Him. Now the Lord Jesus, the God-exalted ascended Son of Man, is at the right hand of God, having received from God the name which is above every name, a name that will be openly confessed by all those on every level of the universe. Today those believers in Christ who pursue Him out of their love for Him call upon the name of the God-exalted Jesus, confessing with their mouth Jesus as Lord and knowing with full assurance that “this Jesus” is Lord of all and rich to all who call upon Him (Rom. 10:12).

The Ascended Jesus as Lord of All

In Acts 2:36 Peter declared, “Let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made Him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you have crucified.” In His ascension the Lord Jesus was made the Lord of all to possess all. As God, Christ was the Lord all the time (Luke 1:43; John 11:21; 20:28), but as man, He was made the Lord in His ascension after His humanity was brought into God in His resurrection and He was designated the firstborn Son with both humanity and divinity (Rom. 1:3-4). He was the Lord before His ascension, but He was not officially inaugurated into this status, office, and position until He ascended to be at the right hand of God. God has always been the Lord, but now there is a man on the throne. In the ascension, God made Jesus the Nazarene the Lord of the whole universe. For God to be the Lord, there was no need for an inauguration, but for a lowly man from a town in a despised region to be made the Lord of all required an inauguration. Through observing the ascension of Jesus the Nazarene, Peter came to realize that the man Jesus, whom he

had followed during His ministry on earth, had been inaugurated to be the Lord. Now the Lord of the universe, the Lord of heaven and earth, is a real man whose name is Jesus. As the Lord of all, the Lord Jesus now possesses the whole universe, God's chosen people, and all positive things, matters, and persons, including the angels and all those who will be dwelling on earth during the millennium and in the new heaven and new earth.

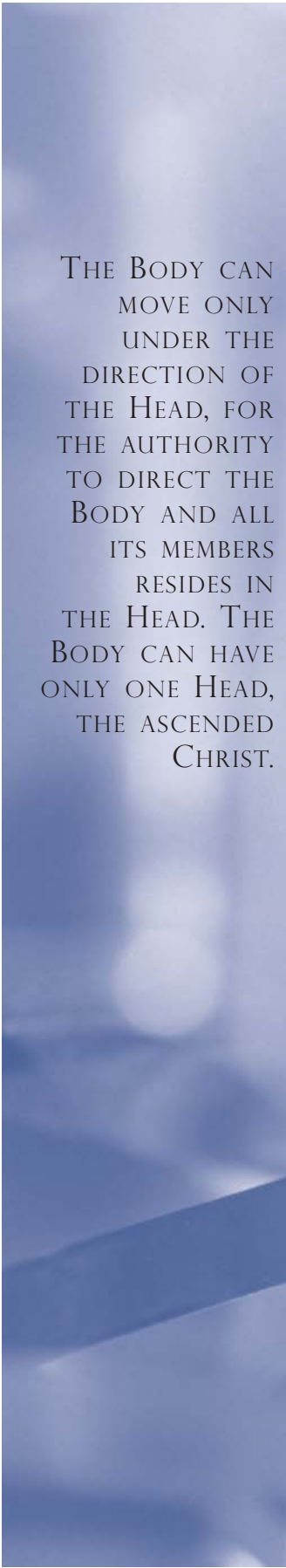
In Acts 10 Peter said that God announced the gospel of peace through Jesus Christ, testifying that "this One is Lord of all" (v. 36). As the context indicates, here the word *all* refers not to all things but to all people. Peter, a Jew, who had no contact or dealings with Gentiles, was directed by a vision and constrained by the Spirit to announce the gospel to the Gentiles who were gathered in the house of Cornelius. As Peter was speaking in the house of Cornelius, a Gentile ruler, Peter saw that the Lord Jesus is Lord not only of the Jews but also of the Gentiles. The Son of God had been given authority over all flesh in order to give eternal life to all who were given to Him by God the Father (John 17:2). If Christ were not the Lord of all people, He would not have the ground to give eternal life to us. However, He is the Lord of all, and we are under His authority and have the position to receive eternal life in the Son (1 John 5:11-12).

The lordship of Christ is one of the most important aspects of what was granted to Him in His ascension. God bestowed on Him the name that is the highest name and made Him, a glorified, resurrected God-man, to be the Lord of the universe, the Lord of all to possess all. Because the unique lordship of Christ has been established in His ascension, as believers in Christ, as members of His Body, we need to realize this divine, heavenly fact and learn to apply it both in our personal Christian life and in the corporate church life.

The Ascended Jesus as the Head over All Things to the Church

The Lord Jesus has been made the Lord by God, and He is the Leader of all the rulers (Acts 5:31) and the Ruler of the kings of the earth (Rev. 1:5). Even more, in Christ's ascension God made Him the Head over all things to the church—the unique Head (Eph. 1:22). God inaugurated Him into the headship of the universe; the Head of the universe is Jesus. God caused His great power "to operate in Christ in raising Him from the dead and seating Him at His right hand in the heavenlies, far above all rule and authority and power and lordship and every name that is named not only in this age but also in that which is to come; and He subjected all things under His feet and gave Him to be Head over all things to the church" (vv. 20-22). That it was in the ascension of Jesus that God gave Christ the headship of the universe indicates that prior to the ascension of the Lord Jesus the headship of Christ was not fully established. In order for Christ to be the Head over all things, He needs to be both God and man. Contrary to the natural human concept, being God alone was not sufficient or adequate for Christ to be the Head of the universe (1 Chron. 29:10-13). Christ as the Son of God alone was not fully qualified to be the Head over all things in God's administration. According to God's economy—His plan and arrangement to carry out His eternal purpose—God will not exercise His judgment in His administration as God alone; He needs a man to exercise His judgment in His administration, because His administration is closely related to and involved in dealing with the enemy, Satan (Acts 17:31). God has a governmental administration in the universe for two main reasons (Gen. 1:26). On the positive side, God needs an administration in order to carry out His eternal purpose to have the church as His corporate expression (Eph. 1:10-11; 3:11; Matt. 6:9-10). On the negative side, God needs a government to deal with His enemy and all the evil powers (Col. 2:15; Heb. 2:14; 1 John 3:8). Without man God's eternal purpose could never be fulfilled, and His enemy could not be dealt with. Because the enemy of God is a creature, God needs another creature, man, to

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THE ASCENDED
CHRIST.

deal with this rebellious creature. God will not deal with the enemy directly as God but through the man created by Him for this intention.

Because man is needed to carry out God's eternal purpose and to deal with His enemy, before Christ became a man, His headship over the earth and the entire universe could not be fully established (John 1:14; Rom. 8:3; Heb. 2:14; Eph. 1:22-23). By dying on the cross, Christ accomplished God's purpose, and He defeated Satan and destroyed the power of death (John 17:4; 19:30; Heb. 2:14). Because He gained the human element in His incarnation and accomplished God's purpose in His crucifixion as the Son of Man, He is now completely qualified to be the Head of the universe in God's administration. Thus, in the ascension of Jesus, God inaugurated Him into the universal headship over all for God's administration. In this way the universal headship of Christ has been fully established.

As the Head over all things to the church, which is His Body, Christ is both the Head of the church corporately and also the Head directly of every believer in Christ, every member of the Body of Christ (Col. 1:18; 1 Cor. 11:3). Ephesians 1:10 says, "Unto the economy of the fullness of the times, to head up all things in Christ, the things in the heavens and the things on the earth, in Him." There is an intrinsic connection between God heading up all things in Christ and Christ being the Head over all things to the church (vv. 22-23). In order for God to establish Christ as the Head over all things, He must first make Christ the Head of the church. This means that the future position of Christ in the universe has much to do with His position in the church today (Col. 1:18; 2:19; 3:4, 10-11; Eph. 1:22-23; 4:15-16). God must first secure Christ's headship in the church, and this is why it is crucial for Christ to be the Head of the church and the Head to the church. For Christ to be the Head of the Body and to the Body is for Him to have all the authority in the Body (Col. 1:18; Matt. 28:18). The Body can move only under the direction of the Head, for the authority to direct the Body and all its members resides in the Head. The Body can have only one Head, the ascended Christ, and can submit to only one Head, the enthroned Christ. Only Christ is the unique Head, and all the members of the Body must submit to Him, honoring and testifying to the unique headship of the God-exalted Christ, the Head of the universe.

The Ascended Jesus and the Corporate "Me"

As the Lord of all and the Head over all things to the church, the ascended Jesus is intrinsically related to the "Me." In Acts 9:3 a light from heaven "beyond the brightness of the sun" flashed around Saul of Tarsus (26:13), and "he fell on the ground and heard a voice saying to him, Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" (9:4). Saul asked, "Who are You, Lord?" and immediately, there was an answer from the ascended Lord: "I am Jesus, whom you persecute" (v. 5). Saul had been persecuting the believers, those who called on the name of the Lord, believed into Him, were saved by Him, and were one with Him. The Lord Himself connected the name "Jesus" with "Me," thereby revealing something amazing and profound—the church as the corporate Christ (1 Cor. 12:12). We urgently need to see that the "Me" in Acts 9:4 is a corporate "Me," a corporate person composed of the ascended Jesus—the Lord and the Head—and the believers as members of His Body, the church. Saul responded with a second question addressed to the One whom he recognized as the Lord: "What shall I do, Lord?" (22:10). Instead of answering Saul's question, Jesus said, "Rise up and go into Damascus, and there it will be told to you concerning all the things which have been appointed to you to do" (v. 10). And this is what happened when an ordinary member of the Body, a believer named Ananias, was sent by the Head to direct Saul concerning what to do. Saul, who was praying, looked up at him, and Ananias said, "The God of our fathers has previously appointed you to know His will and to see the righteous One and to hear the voice from His mouth; for you will be a witness to Him

unto all men of the things which you have seen and heard. And now, why do you delay? Rise up and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on His name” (vv. 14-16). First, the ascended Jesus spoke directly to Saul, and then, introducing him to the reality and practicality of the church as the Body of Christ, the ascended Jesus spoke to Saul through a brother in the Lord, a member of the Body who was functioning under the authority of the Lord and the direction of the Head and who was used by Him to initiate Saul into identification with the Body. Saul had been saved directly by the Lord, but he needed a member of the Body to receive him as a believer, leading him into the life of the Body expressed and lived out in local churches. Thus, Saul met the corporate “Me,” the corporate Christ, the church as the Body of Christ, for which he would labor and suffer for the rest of his life.

The following note is exceedingly helpful in knowing the “Me” in Acts 9:4 and Saul’s new relationship with this corporate person:

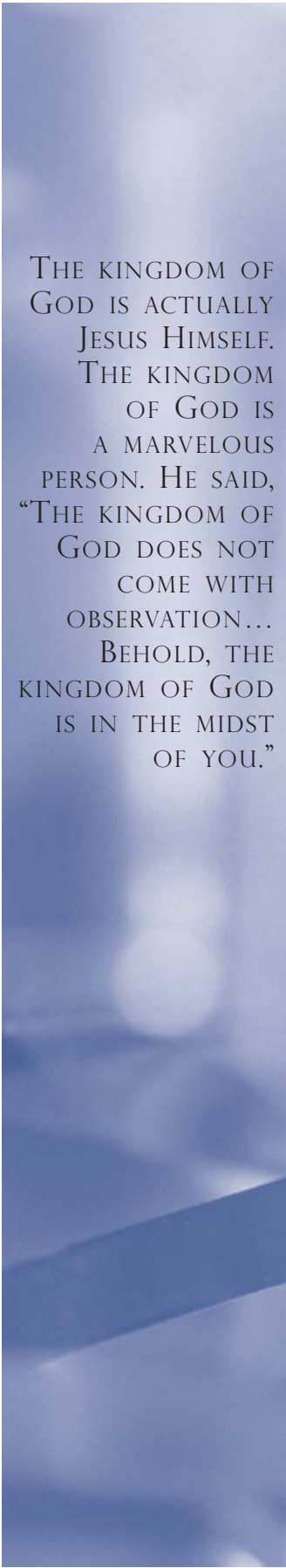
A corporate “Me,” comprising Jesus the Lord and all His believers. Saul did not have this revelation. He thought that he was persecuting Stephen and other Jesus-followers, who were in the Way, which he considered heresy (24:14). He did not know that when he persecuted these he persecuted Jesus, for they were one with Him by being united to Him through their faith in Him. He considered that he was persecuting people on earth, never thinking that he touched anyone in heaven. To his great surprise a voice from heaven told him that He was the One whom he was persecuting and that His name was Jesus. To him this was a unique revelation in the universe! By this he began to see that the Lord Jesus and His believers are one great person—the wonderful “Me.” This must have impressed and affected him for his future ministry concerning Christ and the church as the great mystery of God (Eph. 5:32) and laid a solid foundation for his unique ministry. (Lee, Recovery Version, Acts 9:4, note 1).

From the foregoing we can see and begin to appreciate a most wonderful and marvelous matter related to the ascension of Jesus—the ascended Jesus in heaven and the believers on earth are a corporate person, the corporate “Me.” The more we realize this, the more we will experience and enjoy the Lord not merely for our personal spiritual advancement but also for the building of the church, the Body of Christ, the “Me” that was revealed to Saul and, through him, to those believers who seriously seek the Lord and live to Him for the fulfillment of the eternal purpose of God.

The Ascended Jesus and the Kingdom of God

To the apostles the resurrected Christ presented Himself, “appearing to them through a period of forty days and speaking the things concerning the kingdom of God” (1:3), helping them to have a proper understanding of the kingdom.” It is significant that in his narrative Luke emphasizes the Lord’s repeated speaking not merely of the kingdom of God in a general way but in “the things concerning the kingdom of God.” This indicates that the kingdom would be a primary subject of the apostles’ preaching of the gospel. Many in Samaria “believed Philip, who announced the gospel of the kingdom of God and of the name of Jesus Christ” (8:12). The gospel, the kingdom, and the name, the person, of Jesus are one reality; the ascended Jesus is intrinsically related to both the gospel and the kingdom of God. The apostles established “the souls of the disciples, exhorting them to continue in the faith and saying that through many tribulations we must enter into the kingdom of God” (14:22). Paul “entered into the synagogue and spoke boldly for three months, reasoning and persuading them in the things concerning the kingdom of God” (19:8). While Paul was in Rome, “many came to him at his lodging, to whom he expounded these matters, solemnly testifying of the kingdom of God and persuading them concerning Jesus from both the Law of Moses and the Prophets, from morning until evening” (28:23). Again the kingdom of God and Jesus are mentioned together, demonstrating that the ascended Jesus and

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the kingdom are inseparable. Paul “remained two whole years in his own rented dwelling and welcomed all those who came to him, proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching the things concerning the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness, unhindered” (vv. 30-31). Luke’s narrative concludes with Paul proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching the things concerning the Lord Jesus, showing once again that Jesus and the kingdom are inextricable.

We are not told what things concerning the kingdom of God that Jesus spoke of to the apostles over a period of forty days, but it is reasonable to suggest that His speaking was a repetition, a reinforcement, and a development of what is recorded in the Gospel of Luke, which is rich in revelation concerning the kingdom of God. Luke 1:32-33 says, “The Lord God will give to Him the throne of David His father, and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever.” These verses reveal that Jesus will have the nation of Israel as “the center of His reign, through which He will rule over the entire earth as His kingdom” (Lee, Recovery Version, Luke 1:33, note 1). In His ministry the Lord Jesus said, “I must announce the gospel of the kingdom of God to the other cities also, because for this I was sent” (4:43). The kingdom of God is what the Savior announced as the gospel, the good news, to those who were in darkness (v. 18). In 8:10 the Lord said to His disciples, “To you it has been given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God.” The kingdom of God, especially as a realm of the divine life into which believers enter through regeneration (John 3:3, 5-6), involves mysteries. God’s plan concerning the kingdom of God was a hidden mystery, which was revealed to the disciples (Rom. 16:25-26; Eph. 3:3). Because the kingdom of God as a realm of the divine life and nature is mysterious, the natural man cannot perceive it; divine revelation is required to understand it. In Luke 13:29 the Lord Jesus spoke concerning the coming age of the kingdom, the millennium: “They will come from the east and the west, and from the north and the south, and will recline at table in the kingdom of God.” The coming millennial kingdom will be a very enjoyable place of God’s salvation, and those who are qualified to enter this realm of delight will recline “at table in the kingdom of God,” having been invited to the Lord’s marriage feast. In 19:12 the Lord again spoke about the coming kingdom: “A certain man of noble birth went to a distant country to receive for himself a kingdom and to return.” The man of noble birth is Jesus; the distant country signifies heaven, where the Lord went after His death and resurrection; and the word *return* refers to His coming back with the kingdom. According to Daniel 7, after the Lord receives the kingdom from God in His ascension, He will come back to rule over the earth.

The most striking aspect of the revelation concerning the kingdom of God in the Gospel of Luke is that the kingdom of God is actually Jesus Himself. The kingdom of God is a marvelous person. This One said, “The kingdom of God does not come with observation...Behold, the kingdom of God is in the midst of you” (17:20-21). The Lord’s word here indicates that the kingdom about which He was speaking is not material but spiritual. The kingdom of God is Jesus the Savior in both His first coming (vv. 21-22) and His second coming (vv. 23-30), when “the Son of Man is revealed” (v. 30). We need to be deeply impressed that the kingdom of God is Jesus Himself as a person. In His first coming, He sowed Himself as the seed of the kingdom to expand the kingdom of God as a realm of the divine life (Mark 4:1-20, 26-29). When He comes again, He will still be the kingdom of God in His person, but since He will come as the Firstborn, the overcomers, who have lived in the reality of the kingdom and become the enlargement of the kingdom, will come with Him. Since the kingdom of God is Jesus in His first coming and second coming, He, as the One exalted to be the Lord of all, is the kingdom of God in His ascension. Prior to His ascension He spoke to the apostles “the things concerning the kingdom of God,” and in His ascension He directed the apostles in their gospel work of preaching and teaching concerning the kingdom of God, which is inseparable from Jesus Himself.

The Ascended Jesus as the Gospel

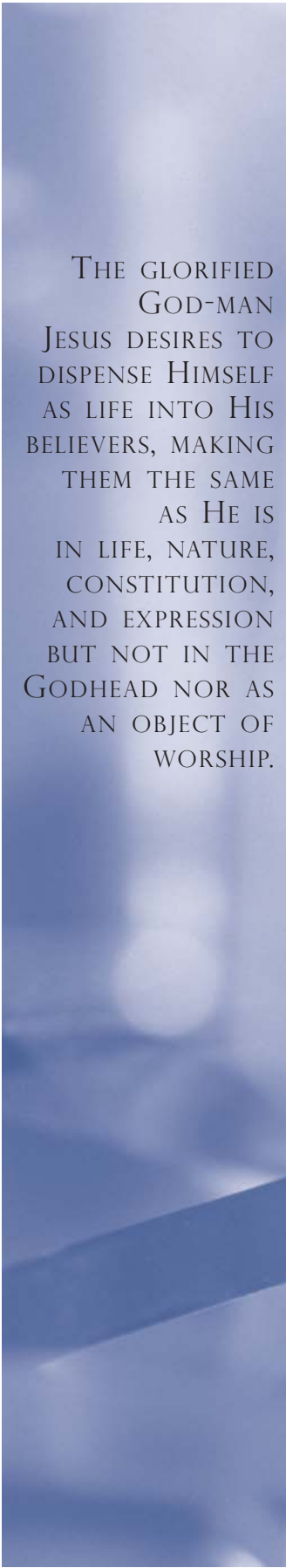
The gospel preached in Acts is the complete gospel: the gospel of Jesus as the Christ (5:42), the word as the gospel (8:4), the gospel of the kingdom of God (v. 12), the gospel of the name of Jesus Christ (v. 12), the gospel of peace (10:36), the Lord Jesus as the gospel (8:35; 11:20), the gospel of the grace of God (20:24), Jesus and the resurrection as the gospel (17:18), and the gospel of the promise made to the fathers (13:32). Every aspect of the complete gospel in the book of Acts is related to the Lord Jesus Himself as a person; He, the all-inclusive Christ, is the word, the kingdom, the resurrection, the grace, and the peace. It should come as no surprise that Philip announced the gospel of the name of Jesus Christ and proclaimed the Lord Jesus Himself as the gospel. After Philip ran up to the eunuch, who was sitting in his chariot and reading Isaiah the prophet, Philip asked him, "Do you really know the things that you are reading?" (8:30). The eunuch replied, "How could I unless someone guides me?" (v. 31). He was reading Isaiah 53 and wanted to know about whom the prophet was speaking. "Philip opened his mouth, and beginning from this Scripture he announced Jesus as the gospel to him" (v. 35). The eunuch was reading about a person—Christ with His vicarious death as unveiled in Isaiah 53—and Philip announced a person—Jesus—as the gospel to him. For Philip and others whose gospel preaching is recorded in Acts, the gospel was a person—the incarnated, crucified, resurrected, and ascended Lord Jesus. For them the Lord Himself was the content of the gospel (26:13-19).

A particular vital aspect of the complete gospel is "the gospel of the promise made to the fathers, that God has fully fulfilled this promise to us their children in raising up Jesus, as it is also written in the second Psalm, 'You are My Son; this day have I begotten You'" (13:32-33). The promise mentioned here is the word spoken to David in 2 Samuel 7:12-14: "When your days are fulfilled and you sleep with your fathers, I will raise up your seed after you, which will come forth from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. It is he who will build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be his Father, and he will be My son." This prophetic word is echoed in Acts 13:23: "From this man's seed, God, according to promise, brought to Israel a Savior, Jesus." We should note the use of the name Jesus here and in verse 33. The seed who is the Savior is Jesus, and the One who was begotten to be the Son of God in resurrection is Jesus. The following note points out the connection between 2 Samuel 7:12-14 and Romans 1:3-4 and Acts 13:33:

The word concerning "your seed" in [2 Samuel 7:12] and "My son" in v. 14 implies that the seed of David would become the Son of God, i.e., that a human seed would become a divine Son. This word corresponds with Paul's word in Rom. 1:3-4 concerning Christ as the seed of David being designated the Son of God in His humanity in resurrection...It also relates to the Lord's question in Matt. 22:41-45 concerning how the Christ could be both the son of David and the Son of God as David's Lord—a wonderful person, a God-man with two natures, divinity and humanity. These verses clearly unveil that a seed of man, i.e., a son of man, can become the Son of God. God Himself, the divine One, became a human seed, the seed of a man, David. This seed was Jesus, the God-man, Jehovah the Savior (Matt. 1:18-21; 2 Tim. 2:8), who was the Son of God by virtue of His divinity alone (Luke 1:35). Through His resurrection He as the human seed became the Son of God in His humanity as well. Thus, in Christ God was constituted into man, man was constituted into God, and God and man were mingled together to be one entity, the God-man. (Lee, Recovery Version, 2 Sam. 7:14, note 1)

Through incarnation God became man, the Son of Man, and through resurrection a man became the Son of God. Regarding this, Acts 13:33, a quotation of Psalm 2:7, is of vital importance: "You are My Son; this day have I begotten You." Paul applies this word to Jesus in resurrection, through which, as we have pointed out, He became the


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firstborn Son, the Son of God in and with His humanity. In Acts 13:32-39 we see Jesus as the Son of God who was promised to the fathers and was begotten by God in His resurrection to be the Firstborn. As verse 33 reveals, resurrection was a birth to the man Jesus. In the Godhead He was, is, and always will be the only begotten Son with divinity alone, but in resurrection He became the firstborn Son among many brothers (Rom. 8:29). Evidently, Paul was able to see the resurrection of Jesus in Psalm 2:7; he applied *today (this day)* in Acts 13:33 to the day of the Lord's resurrection, showing that Christ's resurrection was His birth as the firstborn Son of God. This means that God's raising up Jesus from the dead was God's begetting of Jesus in His humanity to be the Firstborn. In Acts 13 Paul was proclaiming Christ not as the only begotten Son of God, the One seen in the Gospel of John (1:18). Paul was preaching Christ Jesus as the firstborn Son of God for the propagation of the resurrected, ascended Jesus so that Christ would have many brothers conformed to His image and God the Father would be able to bring many sons into glory for His eternal, corporate expression (Rom. 8:29; Heb. 2:10). Because this was Paul's intention, burden, and commission, he announced the resurrection of Jesus as His birth to be the firstborn Son. If we see this, we will understand the connection between Romans 1:3-4 and 8:29. The gospel of God, in which Paul served God (1:1, 9), was a declaration of God's desire to have many sons—the many brothers of the resurrected Christ (John 20:17)—as the reproduction of the firstborn Son born in resurrection. This is the central matter regarding the resurrected Jesus as the gospel in the book of Acts (Lee, *Conclusion* 2993-2995).

Conclusion

Knowing the significance of the ascension of Jesus is not an end in itself but should issue in the believers' experience and enjoyment of Christ corporately as His church and personally as His brothers. "With the Glorified in heaven / Is the church identified; / By the Spirit of this Jesus / Are His members edified" (*Hymns*, #132). On the one hand, the church, the Body of Christ, is seated with the Lord in the heavenlies (Eph. 2:6); on the other hand, the Spirit of the glorified Jesus is operating in the Body for the organic building up of the church. In order to have the genuine church life as practiced in Acts and revealed in the Epistles, the believers must know, experience, and enjoy the Lord Jesus in every aspect of His ascension: "Lo! a man is now in heaven / As the Lord of all enthroned; / This is Jesus Christ our Savior / With God's glory ever crowned!" (ibid). This glorified, ascended man, the God-man Jesus, desires to dispense Himself as life into His believers, making them the same as He is in life, nature, constitution, and expression but not in the Godhead nor as an object of worship. If we would experience this dispensing, we must realize that there is a man in the glory whose life is for us, who is "joyful and radiant, / Expecting to see / His Life in the glory / Lived out in [us]" (*Hymns*, #505). May the joyful and radiant Jesus in His ascension become more and more real and dear to us as we seek Him, love Him, and live in union with Him for the fulfillment of God's eternal purpose. 

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