

bodies of saints will then be formed; and his resurrection is the earnest and pledge of theirs; for he is the first-fruits of them that slept, that is, of the dead; the first-fruits are the sample, and what ensure a following harvest; so the resurrection of Christ is the sample, and gives assurance of the resurrection of the saints in time to come: so that Christ's resurrection being certain, the resurrection of the saints is also.

OF THE ASCENSION OF CHRIST TO HEAVEN.

THE Ascension of Christ to Heaven, was, as his death, burial, and resurrection, according to the Scriptures; he himself gave hints of it to his disciples, even before his death, as well as after his resurrection; *What and if ye shall see the Son of man ascend up where he was before?* John vi. 62. It was also pre-signified both by Scripture prophecies and by Scripture types.

I. By Scripture prophecies, of which there are many, some more obscurely, others more clearly point unto it.

i. A passage in Psalm xlvii. 5, *God is gone up with a shout; the Lord with the sound of a trumpet.* The whole Psalm is applied, by some Jewish writers, to the times of the Messiah, and this verse particularly, who is the great King over all the earth, 2, 7, and more manifestly appeared so at his ascension, when he was made and declared Lord and Christ; and who subdued the Gentile world, 3, through the ministration of his gospel; by which, after his ascension, he went into it, conquering and to conquer, and caused his ministers to triumph in it. And though it was in his human nature that he went up from earth to heaven, yet it was in that, as in union with his divine Person; so that it may be truly said that God went up to heaven; in like sense as God is said to purchase the church with his blood; even God in our nature; God manifest in the flesh; Immanuel, God with us: and though this circumstance of his ascension, being attended with a shout, and with the sound of a trumpet, is not mentioned in the New Testament, in the account of it; yet there is no doubt to be made of it, since the angels present at it told the disciples on the spot, that this same Jesus should so come, in like manner as they saw him go into heaven: now, it is certain that Christ will descend from heaven with the voice of an archangel, and with the trump of God: and also, since he was attended in his ascension with the angels of God, and with some men who rose after his resurrection; there is scarce any question to be made to it, that he ascended amidst their shouts and acclamations; and the rather, since he went up as a triumphant Conqueror, over all his and our enemies, leading captivity captive.

ii. The words of the Psalmist, in Psalm cx. 1, *The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand,* &c., though they do not express, yet they plainly imply, the ascension of Christ to heaven; for unless he ascended to heaven, how could he sit down at the right hand of God there? and hence the apostle Peter thus argues and reasons upon them; *For David is not ascended into the heavens;* not in his body, and

therefore the words are not spoken of him, but of one that is ascended; *But he himself saith,* not of himself, but another, even of his Lord the Messiah; *The Lord said unto my Lord,* &c., Acts ii. 34, 35.

iii. The vision Daniel had of the Son of man, in chap. vii. 13, 14, is thought by some to have respect to the ascension of Christ to heaven; he is undoubtedly meant by one like unto the Son of man; that is, really and truly man; as he is said to be in the likeness of men, and to be found in fashion as a man; the same came in the clouds of heaven; so a cloud received Christ, and conveyed him to heaven, at his ascension; and he was brought near to the Ancient of days, to God, who is from everlasting to everlasting; and was received with a welcome by him; and there were given him dominion, glory, and a kingdom; as Christ, at his ascension, was made, or made manifest, openly declared Lord and Christ, Head and King of his church. Though this vision will have a farther accomplishment at the second coming of Christ, when his glorious kingdom will commence in the personal reign; who will not deliver up the kingdom until that reign is ended. Once more,

iv. The prophecy in Mic. ii. 13, may be understood as referring to this matter, *The breaker-up is come up before them;* which, in the latter part of the verse, is thus explained; *And their King shall pass before them, and the Lord on the head of them;* so that a divine person is meant, who is Head and King of the church, and plainly points to Christ, who may be called Phorez, the Breaker; as Pharez had his name from the same word, because he broke forth before his brother; as Christ, at his birth, broke forth into the world in an uncommon way, being born of a virgin; and at his death broke through the troops of hell, and spoiled principalities and powers; broke down the middle wall of partition, that stood between Jews and Gentiles; and at his resurrection, broke the cords of death, as Samson did his withes, with which he could be no more nor longer held by them, than he with them; and at his ascension he broke up, and broke his way through the region of the air, and through legions of devils; at the head of those that were raised with him when he rose, angels and men shouting as he passed along.

v. What most clearly foretold the ascension of Christ to heaven, is in Psalm lxviii. 18, which is, by the apostle Paul, quoted and applied to the ascension of Christ, Eph. iv. 8—10, and all the parts of it agree with him; he is spoken of in the context, in the words both before and after. He is the Lord that was among the angels in Sinai, who spoke to Moses there; and from whom he received the oracles of God, to give to Israel: and he is the God of salvation, the author of it to his people. And of him it may be truly said, that he ascended on high, far above all heavens, the visible heavens, the airy and starry heavens, and into the third heaven, the more glorious seat of the divine Majesty: he has led captivity captive; either such as had been prisoners in the grave, but freed by him, and who went with him to heaven; or the enemies of his people, who have led them captive, as Satan and his principalities; the allusion is to leading captives in

triumph for victories obtained. Christ received, upon his ascension, gifts for men; and, as the apostle expresses it, gave them to men; he received them in order to give them; and he gave them, in consequence of his receiving them: and even he received them for, and gave them to, rebellious men, as all by nature are foolish and disobedient; and even those be to whom he gives gifts fitting for public usefulness; and such an one was the apostle Paul, as the account of him, and his own confessions, show, who received a large measure of those gifts of grace; the end of bestowing which gifts was, that the Lord God might dwell among men, gathered out of the world, through the ministry of the word, into gospel-churches, which are built up for a habitation for God, through the Spirit.

II. The ascension of Christ was presignified by Scripture types; personal ones, as those of Enoch and Elijah; the one in the times of the patriarchs, before the flood, and before the law; the other in the times of the prophets, after the flood, and after the law was given. Enoch, a man that walked with God, and had communion with him, was not; he was not on earth, after he had been some time on it; *God took him* from thence up to heaven, soul and body, Gen. v. 24. Elijah went up to heaven in a whirlwind, in a chariot, and horses of fire; was carried up by angels, who appeared in such a form, when he and Elisha had been conversing together, 2 Kings ii. 11. So Christ was carried up to heaven, received by a cloud, attended by angels, while he was blessing his disciples: more especially, the high priest was a type of Christ in this respect, when he entered into the holiest of all once a year, with blood and incense; which were figures of Christ's entering into heaven with his blood, and to make intercession for men, Heb. ix. 23, 24. The ark in which the two tables were, was a type of Christ, who is the fulfilling end of the law for righteousness; and the bringing up of the ark from the place where it was to Mount Zion, which some think was the occasion of penning the twenty-fourth Psalm, in which are these words, *Be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors, and the King of glory shall come in*; and of the forty-seventh Psalm, where are the above words, *God is gone up with a shout, &c.*, the bringing up of which ark to Zion may be considered as an emblem of Christ's ascension to heaven, sometimes signified by Mount Zion.

Now, as it was foretold by prophecies and types, that Christ should ascend to heaven, so it is matter of fact that he has ascended thither; concerning which may be observed,

I. The evidence of it, as the angels of God, who were witnesses of it; for as Christ went up to heaven in the sight of his apostles, two men stood by them in white apparel, who were angels, that appeared in a human form, and thus arrayed, to denote their innocence and purity; and other angels attended him in his ascent, when it was that he was seen of angels, who were eye-witnesses of his ascension. The eleven apostles were together, and others with them, when this great event was; and while he was pronouncing a blessing on them, he was parted from them, and carried up to heaven; they beheld him, and

looked steadfastly towards heaven, as he went up, until a cloud received him out of their sight, Luke xxiv. 33—51, Acts i. 9, 10. Yea, after this, when he had ascended to heaven, and had entered into it, and was set down on the right hand of God, he was seen by Stephen the proto-martyr, and by the apostle Paul; whilst Stephen was suffering, looking steadfastly to heaven, he saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God; and at the same time declared it to the Jews, that he saw the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God, Acts vii. 55, 56. Christ appeared to the apostle Paul at his conversion, when he was caught up into the third heaven, and heard and saw things not to be uttered; and afterwards, when in a trance in the temple, he says, *I saw him*, Acts xxvi. 16. Moreover, the extraordinary effusion of the Spirit, on the day of Pentecost, is a proof of Christ's ascension to heaven, Acts ii. 33; for before this time, the Spirit was not given in an extraordinary manner; *because Jesus was not yet glorified*; but when he was glorified, and having ascended to heaven, and being at the right hand of God, then the Spirit was given; and the gift of him was a proof of his ascension and glorification, John vii. 39.

The time of Christ's ascension, which was forty days from his resurrection; which time he continued on earth, that his disciples might have full proof, and be at a certainty of the truth of his resurrection: to whom he showed himself alive after his passion, by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days; not that he was with them all that forty days, but at several times in that interval: on the first day he appeared to many, and on that day sennight again to his disciples; at another time at the sea of Tiberias; and again on a mountain in Galilee. Now, by these several interviews the apostles had opportunities of making strict and close observation, of looking wistly at him, of handling him, of conversing with him, of eating and drinking with him, of reasoning upon things in their own minds, and of having their doubts resolved, if they entertained any; and had, upon the whole, infallible proofs of the truth of his resurrection: in this space of time also he renewed their commission and enlarged it, and sent them into the whole world to preach and baptize, and farther to instruct those that were taught and baptized by them; now it was he opened the understandings of his apostles, that they might more clearly understand the Scriptures concerning himself, which he explained unto them, that so they might be the more fitted for their ministerial work; he also spoke to them of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God, the gospel-church-state; of the nature of a gospel-church, of the officers of it, of ordinances in it, and discipline to be observed therein; wherefore all that they afterwards delivered out and practised, were according to the directions and prescriptions given by him: and as all this required time, such a length of time was taken as that of forty days; yet longer it was not proper he should continue with them in this state, lest his apostles should think he was about to set up a temporal kingdom on earth, which their minds were running upon, and inquiring after, and expecting, Acts i. 5, 6; and besides, it

was proper that they should be endued with the Holy Ghost in an extraordinary manner, to qualify them for the important work Christ gave them a commission to do, and which they could not receive until Christ was ascended and glorified.

iii. The place from whence, and the place whither Christ ascended, may next be considered. — 1. The earth on which he was when he became incarnate, the world into which he came to save men, out of which he went when he had done his work, the particular spot of ground from whence he ascended was mount Olivet, as appears from Acts i. 12, a place he frequented much in the latter part of his life; and it was in a garden at the bottom of the mount where his sufferings began, where his soul was exceeding sorrowful, even unto death; and where he put up that prayer, Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; and where he was in such an agony, that his sweat was as drops of blood falling to the ground; and from this very spot he ascended to his God and Father, to enjoy his presence, and all the pleasures of it, and partake of the glory promised him. One of the evangelists tells us, that he led his disciples as far as Bethany, and there blessed them, and was parted from them; which must not be understood of the town of Bethany, but of a part of mount Olivet near to Bethany, and which bore that name, and which signifies the house of affliction, from whence Christ went to heaven; and as it was necessary he should suffer the things he did, and enter into his glory, so his people must through many tribulations enter the kingdom, Acts xiv. 22. — 2. The place whither he ascended, heaven, even the third heaven; hence Christ is often said to be carried up into heaven, taken up into heaven, towards which the disciples were gazing as he went up; passed into heaven, and was received into heaven, where he remains; and which is to be understood, not merely of a glorious state, into which he passed, exchanging a mean, uncomfortable and suffering one, for a glorious, happy and comfortable one; which is meant by the two witnesses ascending to heaven, even a more glorious state of the church, Rev. xi. 12; but a place in which he is circumscribed in his human nature, where he is, and not elsewhere, nor everywhere; which has received him, and where he is, and will be retained until the times of the restitution of all things; from whence he is expected, and from whence he will descend at the last day: he is gone to his Father there, and has taken his place at his right hand; who, though everywhere, being omnipresent, yet heaven is more especially the place where he displays his glory; and who is called, *Our Father*, and Christ's Father, who is *in heaven*; and of going to him at his ascension he often spoke, John xvi. 10—28.

iv. The manner of Christ's ascension, or in what sense he might be said to ascend; not figuratively, as God is sometimes said to go down and to go up, Gen. xi. 6, and xvii. 22; which must be understood consistent with the omnipresence of God; not of any motion from place to place, but of some exertion of his power, or display of himself; nor in appearance only, as it might seem to beholders, but in reality and truth; nor was it a disappearance of him merely, as in Luke

xxiv. 31; for he was seen going up, and was gazed at till a cloud received him out of sight; nor was it in a visionary way, as the apostle Paul was caught up into the third heaven, not knowing whether in the body or out of the body; nor in a spiritual manner, in mind affections, in which sense saints ascend to heaven, when in spiritual frames of soul; but really, visibly, and locally: this ascension of Christ was a real motion of his human nature, which was visible to the apostles, and was by change of place, even from earth to heaven; and was sudden, swift, and glorious, in a triumphant manner: and he went up as he will come again, in a cloud, in a bright cloud, a symbol of his divine majesty, either literally taken; or if understood of the appearance of angels in the form of a bright cloud, as by Dr. Hammond, it is expressive of the same; nor does it at all affect the reality, locality, and visibility of Christ's ascension, so to understand it: nor can Luke, as a historian, be chargeable with an impropriety in his relation of it in such sense, any more than in the same account by representing angels as appearing in a human form, and in white apparel; nor than that the author of the Book of Kings is, in relating the ascent of Elijah to heaven in a chariot and horses of fire, generally understood of angels in such a form, 2 Kings ii. 11; as the horses and chariots of fire also are in chap. vi. 17; which yet were really and visibly seen; and the rather it may be thought that the angels are intended in the account of Christ's ascension, since as the Lord makes *the clouds his chariots*, Psalm civ. 3; so certain it is, the angels are the twenty thousand chariots of God among whom Christ was, and enclosed, as in a bright cloud, when he ascended on high, all which serve to set forth the grandeur and majesty in which Christ ascended.

v. The cause or causes of Christ's ascension; it was a work of almighty power to cause a body to move upwards with such swiftness, and to such a distance; it is ascribed to the right hand of God, that is, of God the Father; to the power of God, by which he is said to be lifted up and exalted, Acts ii. 33, and v. 31; and therefore it is sometimes passively expressed, that he was carried up, taken up, and received up into heaven; and sometimes actively, as done by himself, by his own power; so it is said, he went up, he lifted up his own body through the union of it to his divine person, and carried it up to heaven; so *God went up with a shout*; see Acts ii. 10; and often he speaks of it as his own, *What if the Son of man ascend, &c.; I ascend to my God, &c.*; the efficient cause of it is God: and being a work *ad extra*, Father, Son, and Spirit, were concerned in it. The procuring or meritorious cause of it was the blood of Christ; by which he made full satisfaction to divine justice, and obtained eternal redemption for his people; and therefore having done the work he engaged to do, it was but fit and just that he should be, not only raised from the dead, but ascend to heaven, and be received there; hence it is said, by his own blood, through the virtue of it, and in consequence of what he had done by it, *he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us*, Heb. ix. 12. The instrumental or ministering causes, were the cloud and the attending angels.

VI. The effects of Christ's Ascension, or the ends to be answered; and which have been answered, are, — 1. To fulfil the prophecies and types concerning it, and particularly that of the high-priest's entering into the holiest of all once a year, to officiate for the people; and so Christ has entered into heaven itself, figured by the most holy place, there to make, and where he ever lives to make, intercession for the saints. — 2. To take upon him more openly the exercise of his kingly office; to this purpose is the parable of the nobleman, Luke xix. 12; by the nobleman is meant Christ himself; see Jer. xxx. 31; by the far country he went into, heaven, even the third heaven, which is far above the visible ones; his end in going there, was to receive a kingdom for himself, to take possession of it, and exercise kingly power; to be made and declared Lord and Christ, as he was upon his ascension, Acts ii. 36; which kingdom will be delivered up at the close of his personal reign, and not before. — 3. To receive gifts for men, both extraordinary and ordinary; and this end has been answered, he has received them, and he has given them; extraordinary gifts he received for and bestowed upon the apostles on the day of Pentecost; and ordinary ones, which he has given since, and still continues to give, to fit men for the work of the ministry, and for the good of his churches and interest in all succeeding ages. — 4. To open the way into heaven for his people, and to prepare a place for them there; he has by his blood entered into heaven himself, and made the way into the holiest of all manifest; and given boldness and liberty to his people through it to enter thither also, even by a new and living way, consecrated through the veil of his flesh, Heb. x. 19, 20; he is the forerunner for them entered, and is gone beforehand to prepare by his presence and intercession a mansion of glory for them in his Father's house. — 5. To assure the saints of their ascension also; for it is to his God and their God, to his Father and their Father, that he is ascended; and therefore they shall ascend also, and be where he is, and be glorified together with him; and all this is to draw up their minds to heaven, to seek things above, where Jesus is; and to set their affections, not on things on earth, but on things in heaven; and to have their conversation there; and to expect and believe that they shall be with Christ for evermore.

SESSION OF CHRIST AT THE RIGHT HAND OF GOD.

THIS follows upon the resurrection and ascension of Christ to heaven; it is in this order things stand according to the Scriptures; Christ was first raised from the dead; then he went to heaven, and was received up into it; and then sat down at the right hand of God, Eph. i. 20, 1 Pet. iii. 22. I shall treat this article much in the same manner as the former.

I. Show that it was foretold in prophecy that Christ should sit at the right hand of God; hence it may be thought, that in prophetic language, and by anticipation, he is called *the man of God's right hand*,