

Christ, the One Returning at the Last Day

When will Christ return and what will be the manner of his coming? Perhaps man speculates on this more than any other question. The answers given are as varied as the men who ask. Yet, the disciples asked the Lord this very same question. He answered them directly in Matt 24:3-6:

As Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately. "Tell us," they said, "when will this happen, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?" Then Jesus began his answer by saying there would be many deceivers: Jesus answered: "Watch out that no one deceives you. 5 For many will come in my name, claiming, 'I am the Christ,' and will deceive many. 6 You will hear of wars and rumors of wars, but see to it that you are not alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come.

There are three general positions taken about the second coming that oppose the clear teaching of Christ and his holy apostles and prophets:

- That Christ has already come.
- That Christ when he comes will establish an earthly kingdom.
- That Christ will come at a predictable date in the future.

Christ Could Not Have Already Come

The people who believe that the Lord has already come have their own non-Biblical language to describe their false teaching. They describe their doctrine as Preterism, post-millennialism, and realized eschatology. These doctrines have in common that they are not in the Bible by thought or word. They hold that all or some of the prophecies about the last days (or end times) were fulfilled in the first century. Realized eschatology stands apart as a doctrine that holds that the teachings of the New Testament do not refer to the future but to the life of Jesus. In their minds, the end of time teachings of the Bible are irrelevant, and the end of the world was the end of the Jewish economy with the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. They have no expectation of a future return of the Lord. Their views are essentially humanistic, looking for inward growth from man himself, and excluding any expectation of influence and events from a higher power. They regard the prophecies of the coming of Christ, the judgment of man, and the destruction of the world either as irrelevant or give them contorted symbolic meanings. These methods violate all rules of Biblical and literary interpretation. For example, they say that the prophecies of the resurrection of the living and the dead are the resurrection of the church from Jewish persecution in A. D. 70. And the judgment where we shall all be manifest before the judgment seat of Christ to give account of the things we have done while in the body is God's judgment against the Jews at the destruction of Jerusalem. The teachings of the Lord and the apostles and prophets clearly exclude any possibility that Christ could have come already, and especially could not have come at the destruction of Jerusalem.

In Matt 24:15-21, the disciples question, "When will these things be and what will be the sign of your coming?" The Lord answered, "So when you see standing in the holy place 'the abomination that causes desolation,' spoken of through the prophet Daniel – let the reader understand – 16 then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains." He was clearly speaking of the destruction of Jerusalem, and they were to see it. He gave them instruction on how to respond in verses 17-20.

In Matt 24:23-24, the Lord said, "At that time if anyone says to you, 'Look, here is the Christ!' or, 'There he is!' do not believe it." The question is what is the antecedent of *that time*? At the destruction of Jerusalem, the abomination of desolation is the antecedent to *that time*. Today when people point to A.D. 70 and say that the Lord came, do not believe it. It was not so then and it is not so now. In the context of *at that time*, the Lord continued in Matt 24:26-28: "So if anyone tells you, 'There he is, out in the desert,' do not go out; or, 'Here he is, in the inner rooms,' do not believe it. 27 For as lightning that comes from the east is visible even in the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man." The second reason the coming of the Lord could not have been in A. D. 70 is that his coming will be seen from the east to the west. This did not happen at the destruction of Jerusalem. Later in this study, the actual facts of the Lord's second coming, as he and the apostles and prophets clearly taught, could in no case be construed to be at the destruction of Jerusalem. Remember, if someone says, he is here or he is there, it is just not so.

Christ, When He Comes, Will Not Establish an Earthly Kingdom

Those who believe that Christ will come and establish a future earthly kingdom believe in a 1,000-year reign of the Lord on the earth, following a period of rapture. These folks believe in a doctrine described by words not found in the Bible; such as, *rapture* and *premillennialism*.

One aspect of this theory is "the rapture". The theory states that immediately prior to the return of Christ to begin his 1,000-year reign, he will immediately take his saints out of the world for a period of seven years. According to the theory, this seven-year period is "the rapture." While the saints are in heaven for these seven years, a great tribulation will fall upon the people left on earth. At the end of the seven-year period, Christ will return to the earth, establish his kingdom, and rule over this earthly kingdom. The word of God does not teach a single element of "the rapture" theory.

Proponents of this theory use 1 Thess 4:14-18 as proof that the saints will "be caught away." But there is no mention of a seven-year period. Nor is there a mention of "the rapture." People add this meaning to the word of God. The saints will be "caught up in the clouds," not for seven years but "And so we will be with the Lord forever." When Paul wrote, "Even so them also that are fallen asleep in Jesus will God bring with Him," (1 Thess 4:14) he was teaching the same thing that he taught in 1 Cor. 15:52. He wrote, "In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed." God will raise the dead in Christ and change the living, and all will ascend to meet the Lord when he comes. This passage speaks of the same final resurrection spoken of in 2 Thess 1:5-10 and in 1 Cor. 15. After this coming of Christ, Paul writes, "Then comes the end (1 Cor. 15:24)." There will be no other resurrection.

Neither in 1 Thess 4 nor elsewhere, does the Bible teach that there will be either a secret or public rapture for seven years. 1 Thess 4 shows that Christ will never actually put his feet upon the earth again. Paul says that the Lord will come in the clouds and we will be caught up to ever be with the Lord. There will be no earth from the time of the catching away of the saints because it will be burning up (2 Peter 3:12). When Christ returns, instead of beginning his reign and establishing an earthly kingdom, he will end his reign and deliver up his Kingdom to the Father (1 Cor 23:26).

The proponents of the 1,000-year reign go to Rev 20:4-10 for their justification. Once again, they must add their own words to scripture to justify their doctrine. In Revelation, there is no mention of the reign of the righteous with the Lord being on the earth. Not only do the scriptures not mention a reign on earth, but also when the Lord comes, the earth will be destroyed (1 Peter 3:12). When then is his reign? The Bible states clearly when his reign shall begin in Eph 1:19-23:

That power is like the working of his mighty strength, 20 which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, 21 far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. 22 And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, 23 which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.

The Bible is equally clear when the Lord will end his reign in 1 Cor 15:22-26:

For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. 23 But each in his own turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him. 24 Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power. 25 For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. 26 The last enemy to be destroyed is death.

Christ Will Not Come at a Predictable Time in the Future

A teaching central to the second coming of the Lord is that no one except the Father, not even Christ himself, knows when it will be. Just as it could not have been at the destruction of Jerusalem (Christ knew exactly when that was coming and gave detailed instructions so that the early Christians could escape), it cannot be at any time known to man. Jesus taught plainly in Matt 24:36, "No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father." The Lord continued in Matt 24:42: "Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come." Again in Matt 24:44: "So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him."

Finally and emphatically the Lord concluded in Matt 24:50-51: "The master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he is not aware of. 51 He will cut him to pieces and assign him a place with the hypocrites, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

Peter also taught this very same principle in 2 Peter 3:10: "But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare." People of today can know assuredly that if a man says that Jesus is coming on date or time certain, they are wrong.

What Will Be the Manner of the Lord's Coming in the Last Day

From this teaching of Christ and Peter, one may see that the manner of the coming of the Lord will be at a time when he is least expected. If someone says that he is here or he is there, do not listen. When he does come, all will see him. Matt 24: 27 taught, "For as lightning that comes from the east is visible even in the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man." The apostles learned that the Lord would return in the same manner that he left in Acts 1:10-11: "They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. 11 "Men of Galilee," they said, "why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven."

The coming will be sudden and visual with the dispensation of judgment. Any less dramatic view is to deny 2 Thess 1:6-10:

6 God is just: He will pay back trouble to those who trouble you 7 and give relief to you who are troubled, and to us as well. This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels. 8 He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. 9 They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power 10 on the day he comes to be glorified in his holy people and to be marveled at among all those who have believed.

The earth even the elements will be destroyed, according to 2 Peter 3:10, "But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare." We will hear the voice of the archangel and the trumpet call of God: "16 For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. 17 After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever." 1 Thess 4:16-18. The dead in Christ shall rise and the living will be changed in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye. 1 Cor 15:50-53 teaches:

50 I declare to you, brothers, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. 51 Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed— 52 in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed.

Conclusion

One cannot avoid the facts. The coming of the Lord is certain, visible, and loud, appearing to all mankind. With his coming will be the resurrection of the dead and the transformation of the living. He will punish the wicked, destroy the heavens and earth, and reward the righteous with life eternal. This is the true and complete word of God. Any other interpretation—raptures, millennial reigns, post-millennialism, pre-millennialism, realized eschatology, earthly wars, the salvation of the Jews—are inventions which have no scriptural supports and which directly violate the direct and emphatic teaching of the Word of God. Who is our Christ and exalted savior? Philippians 2:6-11, our title scripture presents the final word:

6 Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, 7 but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. 8 And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death — even death on a cross! 9 Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, 10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11 and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.