

QUESTIONS WE WANT ANSWERED

53.1 What Is Going to Happen When Christ Returns?

Part I

Scripture: Hebrews 9:24-28

The person who studies, believes, and follows the teaching of Scripture has a guide which not only illumines his personal way, but which enables him to understand what is going on in this world and what the future will bring for all mankind. Christians have always believed that the future is locked away in the omniscience of God, but what God has done is to reveal His plans. The teaching which deals with this subject is known among Bible students as “eschatology.” There is no need to be afraid of the word for it is merely the bringing together of two Greek words, “eschatos” meaning furthest or last and “logia” meaning teaching or doctrine. Thus, we have that division of Christian theology which deals with last things or what is to come. This teaching has to do with one's personal destiny so that there is a personal eschatology, and it has to do with the destiny of the world itself. There is a cosmic or universal eschatology. (John 6:39; 1 Peter 1:20; II Timothy 3:1)

Lest one suspect that such a study is a field of the more practical interests which life holds, let me hasten to say that eschatology is surely inevitable. The rational mind persists in concerning itself with what the future holds. The popularity of crystal-gazing and palm-reading prognosticators, as well as the unparalleled interest in astrology, indicate that eschatology is not confined to religion. In point of fact, philosophy and political ideologies have their systematic theories about the future. One of the reasons the communists believe they are destined to win is because they have a conviction regarding the future based upon their determination and world-view. Philosophically, the Stoics with their view of self-sufficiency and dogged endurance, long ago believed in world cycles where everything was reabsorbed in primal fire and produced anew as originally. Kant, mused in his **Theory Of The Heavens** on the birth and death of worlds. Strauss felt he could compare the cosmos to those tropical trees on which, simultaneously, a blossom bursts forth while a ripe fruit drops from the bough. No, when we talk eschatology, we are not talking musty theology. We are in the mainstream of thought for moral beings.

When we come to the Bible we come to an eschatology which brings hope and comfort. It is not based on a poet's dream or idle speculation. We find a view which is sufficient for the mightiest intellect, and which brings with it more assurance and confidence than any other philosophy or theology in the world. Christian eschatology views this life as preparation for the next. We are, as it were, on probation in this world. Physical death or deliverance at the coming again of Christ is the end of the probation and the entrance into a rewarding eternity. The question we have before us has to do with certain happenings concurrent with the appearing of Christ again on this earth, or set in motion with His appearing. The Hebrews passage (9:24-28) speaks of Jesus as thrice appearing. He has appeared once to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself. He is now appearing before the Father on the behalf of His people, and He will yet appear as conqueror to consummate God's redemptive purpose. The Bible teaches most emphatically that these appearings deal with the same historic person, Jesus Christ.

It is important that we apprehend the interval of time between Christ's appearing to take away sin by the sacrifice of Himself, and His appearing the second time unto those who look for Him. A man the stature of John the Baptist did not differentiate between the time of Christ's sufferings and the time of his glory. In Luke 3:3-6 he announces that *"every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be brought low; and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways shall be made smooth; And all flesh shall see the salvation of God."* Shortly after he saw Jesus coming unto him and announced Him as *"the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world."* (John 1:29) John certainly recognized these activities on the part of Jesus and when it became evident that all men were not seeing the salvation of the Lord, he sent a deputation to Jesus with the question, *"Art thou he that should come? Or look we for another?"* (Luke 7:20) It has been thought that John wavered in his faith because of hardships he had faced, but Christ vindicated him by saying *"a greater than the Baptist has not been born."* (Luke 7:28) John's faith was strong enough, he didn't grasp the truth of the coming again of Christ after His suffering and death. John's misunderstanding was due to the fact that Old Testament teaching did not speak fully to the events that would take place between the two comings. It remained for Jesus to speak of these things in His parables of Matthew 13. The information John lacked, Jesus called *"the mysteries of the kingdom."* (Matthew 13:11)

We want to concern ourselves in this study with the fact that Jesus is coming again, and with certain events which will take place, yea, the broader proportions of His coming. We are looking here to the consequences and in the future will consider the sequence or timing of these things in terms of millennial studies.

I. IT IS CHRIST WHOSE COMING AGAIN WE AWAIT:

It is beyond reason to question the fact that prophecy has a large place in Holy Scripture. We may define prophecy as the area of Biblical truth in which God, who knows the beginning from the end, has been pleased to reveal His plans for the future and the manner in which these plans will come to pass. It seems to me three possible approaches may be made to the study of Biblical prophecy. It can be ignored. It can be overemphasized so that one is concerned with nothing but prophecy. It can be given its place as part of the whole counsel of God. The great prophetic themes are thus given heed to according to II Peter 1:16-21. Jesus offered pointed words to those who were ignorant of prophecy. (Matthew 16:2-3) It was His teaching that we ought to discern the signs of the times. In the Old Testament, seventeen of the thirty nine books are prophetic without mentioning the various prophecies mentioned in the Psalms and the writings of Moses. In the New Testament whole chapters in the Gospels, passage upon passage in the Epistles, and the entire Apocalypse are given to prophecy. Now, it has been noted that at least half of the numerous passages in the Old Testament relate to Christ and His coming in glory to reign. This was so evident that the Jews and the disciple's actually heeded only that part of the Old Testament message. (Acts 1:6; Luke 24:21) You see, they did not realize that Christ would appear in glory only after He appeared for the purpose of suffering. There are 319 references to Christ's coming again in the New Testament. That amounts to one out of every twenty five verses in the New Testament, and by weight of this emphasis we should understand the importance of this doctrine.

The return of Christ will be a personal one, and will be like His departure into heaven. As He ascended, so shall He descend according to the description recorded in Acts 1:11. The message of this return runs throughout the Bible, and the various witnesses to this event are prophetic as mentioned in Zechariah. 14:4-5 and Isaiah 9:7, also Daniel 7:13-14) There is the **angelic witness** as found in Acts 1:11. We might note the accuracy of the angel's message about the first coming of Christ. (Luke 2:10-11) Angels frequently appeared with messages which time proved to be true. They have been found to be competent announcers. Thirdly, the **apostolic witness** holy living. (I John 3:2-3) The

apostle James encourages patience. (James 5:7) Peter tells of better days when Christ will come back. (I Peter 1:7, 13) Paul says the dead will be raised and believers who are alive when Christ comes will be changed. (I Thessalonians 4:16-17) Lastly, we dare not omit the testimony of **Christ Himself** who promised His return. It is the word of a gentleman, a gentleman of the highest order, at least this is always the way Christians have always felt about Jesus. (John 14:2-3) So, we have these witnesses which are reliable to fulfill even legal demand as *"in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established."* (Matthew 18:16) The witnesses do agree. One of the things therefore which will happen when Christ returns is these promises will be verified. God will verify His word.

Inasmuch as it appears pointless to reason that the Bible does not teach the Lord's return, some have sought to understand the teaching as other than a personal return. These erroneous views should at least be mentioned. It should be noted that they do not meet the terms of the *"in like manner"* of Acts 1:11. **First**, the return of Christ does not mean death. This thought is often read into Christ's words, *"Watch therefore, for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come."* (Matthew 24:42) We say that certain verses have no meaning unless death is distinguished from His coming. (John 21:18-23) **Secondly**, the coming of Christ does not mean the descent of the Holy Spirit. This is unreasonable because many of the promises about the coming of Christ were made after the day of Pentecost when the Spirit came. (Philippians 3:21; I Thessalonians. 4:16) None of the happenings associated with Christ's coming took place at Pentecost. No graves opened and no believers swept away to heaven. **Thirdly**, the coming of Christ is not the conversion of a person, Christ said, *"come unto me."* Conversion of life is essentially the repentant coming to Christ. Thessalonian believers were encouraged to wait for the Son from heaven, even though they had turned from idols to serve the living God. (I Thessalonians 1:9-10) **Fourthly**, the coming of Christ to the world is not the spread of the gospel to the world. That, of course, is gradual. The coming of Christ is swift and sudden. (Matthew 24:37) **Fifthly**, it has been suggested that the coming of Christ is the destruction of Jerusalem. We can note this took place in A.D. 70 and the coming of Christ was yet future in the last decade of the first century when the Book of Revelation was written. Beside, the coming of Christ is described as a comfort. (I Thessalonians 4:18)

The coming of Christ again is what the Bible says it will be. Christ Himself is returning, personally, visibly, and physically. This is the only conclusion we may arrive at which squares with the overall message of the Scripture. This truth is recorded in type, figure, symbol, parable, metaphor, poetry, and the most beautiful rhetoric. It is given to us in a direct and dynamic statement, in exhortation, appeal and logic. We can say that the coming of Jesus Christ is the most spoken of event in Scripture in its complete meaning. It is the sum and substance of God's motive to deliver creation from the dreadful effects of sin. It is for Jesus Christ we wait.

II. CHRIST WILL RETURN TO JUSTIFY HIS CROSS AND TO COMPLETE OUR REDEMPTION:

There is a very great reason why Jesus died upon a cross as a spectacle before all of heaven and earth. He did not go through the horror of such a death; He did not cry the cry of a person forsaken by God; He did carry the weight of a world's guilt; He did not receive such an affront to His innocence; He did not accept the antagonism of God's wrath in motion against man's sin; He did not do these things as a teacher to inform us, nor as an example to lead us in selflessness, to make us good and descent. He did them as a Savior to make us unblameable and holy. Paul wrote to the Thessalonians (I Thessalonians 3:13), *"To the end he may establish your hearts unblameable in holiness before God, even our Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all his saints."*

There is a very real way in which our redemption is incomplete. Paul in yonder glory is yet only half redeemed, the same is true of every believer who is there. They are bodiless spirits awaiting houses no longer subject to the effects of sin. Oh, I realize nothing can be added to the work of Christ on the cross as payment for sin's penalty, but how can we consider redemption complete when the body which has been redeemed by blood and indwelt by the Holy Spirit, lies like dust in the grave. Those who live are all the time held in the grasp of weakness and declining health. Not till a Christian receives his body from the grave, renewed like unto the body of Christ, not till we have been clothed upon by an immortal body is salvation according to the eternal purpose of God complete. Further what is true physically is equally true spiritually. As long as we are in this flesh an old nature will hinder our best efforts to live as Christ would have us. There is not a single Christian who lives a single day without a single sin. Somewhere, somehow, and in some way we fall short of the standard of perfection. Our redemption will not be complete till we are rid once for all of this body of death.

(Romans 7:24) When Christ comes we shall be like him, for we shall see him as He is. (I John 3:2) Then will His cross be justified, and He Himself will be satisfied that it has been worth it all. There is a great verse in Isaiah 53:10-11 along these lines. *"He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied."* Shakespeare has well said, "He is well paid who has been well satisfied." This will be the satisfaction of Jesus Christ when He returns.

III. CHRIST WILL RETURN TO REMOVE HIS CHURCH:

Someday millions of people will go to heaven without dying first. You might be one of them. We normally don't think of going to Heaven that way. We have pretty well concluded that we must pass through what is called "death" before ever going to Heaven. Not so! Actually, we know of at least two people who are in Heaven who did not die. One is Enoch and he is spoken of in Genesis 5:21-24 and Hebrews 11:5. He just wasn't found. He was the object of a great man hunt. They couldn't find him he went to Heaven directly body and all. Another person was Elijah. (II Kings 2:16-17) God spiraled him to Heaven in a whirlwind. In the sudden swift disappearance of these two men God has seen fit to give us an example of how millions will one day cause a great deal of confusion in this world by their absence. This event is known among Bible students as the "rapture." It means to be carried away suddenly, to be transported from one place to another. It is described in I Thessalonians 4:13-18. A series of facts may be noted in connection with it. **(1)** It is at a fixed time appointed by God. **(2)** It will take place in the twinkling of an eye. **(3)** Christ will descend from the sky. **(4)** He will cause the believing dead to rise. **(5)** He will change the bodies of the living believers in that moment. **(6)** All believers, changed and resurrected, shall together be taken up on the clouds to meet the Lord in the air in order to be forever with Him. **(7)** Living and dead unbelievers will be left.

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