
The Return of the Lord

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INTRODUCTION

There is enormous confusion in the church over the issue of the Second Coming of Christ. For those who want to move in the Kingdom Vision it is important to know: When does the Kingdom come? When does Jesus return in the clouds? When does the Rapture take place? When is the resurrection of the dead? These issues are actually quite easy to understand and see in scripture when I show you the following truth: The return of the Lord is Three-Fold!

- 1) Jesus has come in the clouds of Judgment as He promised His generation (70AD)
- 2) Jesus is coming through the ages to be manifest in His saints (the Parousia)
- 3) Jesus will come at the Consummation which we call the Second Coming when the resurrection of the dead and the rapture of the living church takes place.

This is like our three-fold salvation process: We have been saved (Justification), we are being saved (Sanctification), we shall be saved (Glorification).

Before His crucifixion Jesus told His disciples that He was going away but that He would return, *"I go to prepare a place for you and if I go to prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you unto myself that where I am you may be also"* (John 14:3). What an incredible statement, I am going to be killed but I am coming back! This has been the clarion call of the church through the ages, Jesus is coming back to take us with Him! Death is not the end, there is a resurrection, there is a place prepared for us in heaven. The death, the resurrection and the return of Jesus Christ is the bedrock of our faith as Christians. But how Christ returns and when Christ returns have caused much debate among us.

The long held view of the church since the time of the Reformation is that there is just one more return of Christ called the Second Advent or the Second Coming of Christ. This is the time that the dead will rise in the resurrection and this is the time that those who are still alive on the earth will be changed in the twinkling of an eye and be caught up into heaven to meet Christ in the air. The Kingdom of God started on earth with Christ's first coming and resurrection and it will finish with His Second Coming in triumph.

But over the last hundred years within the evangelical and charismatic movements there has prevailed another view first popularized by the Brethren movement in the 1800's and the Scofield Bible early in the 1900's. It said basically this: there is first a secret coming of Christ for His saints called the rapture which also includes a resurrection of the saints, then there is a 7 year tribulation period with the appearance of the Antichrist after which there is another coming of Christ which is followed by a thousand year reign of Christ on the earth and then after that there is another resurrection of the dead. So according to this view there are still two more comings of Christ and still two more resurrections and the Kingdom of God has not yet come and will only come some time in the future.

I used to hold the second view but after much study of the Word came to the first view along with such men of God as Oswald J. Smith and Pat Robertson (CBN, The 700 Club) who had this to say:

"We might go through all the writers of the New Testament and we would fail to discover any indication of the so-called two stages of our Lord's coming...there is no verse in the Bible that even mentions it." (Oswald Smith,

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Tribulation or Rapture-Which? P.10.)

“I do not find in the Bible the teaching that Christians will be raptured prior to the tribulation...The Bible teaches two comings of Jesus- one His birth; the second, his coming again in triumph. There is no third coming for a secret rapture.” (Pat Robertson, Answers to 200 of Life’s Most Probing Questions. P.155.156)

This is no longer just a matter for idle speculation or what Paul referred to as “doubtful disputations”. Understanding the time we live in is crucial for preparing for what is coming. If you are in a church fellowship that believes we are getting taken out of here before things get bad and that the Kingdom of Christ is still to come, then you are not ready for what is lying ahead. You are probably getting Sunday morning entertainment instead of getting trained and prepared as a Kingdom warrior for the fight ahead.

End Times Confusion

We have a problem today with popular dispensational prophecy preaching. We have an elaborate system of several comings of Christ and several resurrections, interspersed with a Rapture, a 7 year Great Tribulation and the Millennium reign of Christ. It might look pretty on elaborate charts to try to explain everything but in actual fact it only adds to the confusion of the believers.

Here is the essential fact that will help put everything in its proper order for you to understand scripture:

The Kingdom of God began on earth when Jesus rose from the dead and all power in heaven and earth was given unto Him. He is now Lord over all and He will continue to rule seated at the right of the Father until all His enemies are made His footstool. The last enemy to be conquered is death. He then returns at the last trumpet, with the shout of the Archangel with all His holy angels to gather His saints who are alive on the earth (the Rapture) and raise from the dead those already passed on.

Simple enough? Now let’s look at some scriptures to see how they flow with this simple explanation for the Kingdom and the Second Coming of Christ. There are two sections of scripture that are always quoted when presenting the idea of the Rapture. 1 Cor. 15 and 1 Thes.4. Let’s have a closer look at them and see if we are saying correctly what Paul was trying to explain to his Greek Christian audience. For a moment now just put away all your prophecy books and let the Apostle Paul teach you the simple truth of when the Rapture and Second Coming of Christ take place.

Paul on the Rapture and Second Coming

Put yourself in Paul’s place for a moment. His only scripture to refer to was what we call the Old Testament. So anything he is teaching must be grounded in the scriptures and prophecies of the Old Testament. And now he must also explain these scriptures to his Greek converts in Corinth and Thessalonica.

For Greeks of that day what Paul was presenting was totally new and unknown. They had no conception of history having an ending, or of history actually having a purpose or that there is such a thing as a resurrection from the dead with new spiritual bodies that were tangible.

The Greeks had an idea of life after death but it was a vague idea of ghostly wisps they called “shades” living in “Hades” the place of departed spirits. For them also daily life had not changed for hundreds of years. History just meandered in purposeless circles with nothing really changing. Now read 1 Cor. 15 and begin to see how Paul is teaching them.

For the first 22 verses he is defending the idea that there is such a thing as the resurrection of the dead. Because in verse 12 he says, “...how say some among you that there is no resurrection of the dead.” Some of these Greek converts found this whole idea of a resurrection from the dead to be very alien to them. So for the first 22 verses he goes into an extensive explanation of why it is necessary to our faith that we believe Christ rose from the dead.

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But then from verse 23 he starts to explain how this all fits into God's plan for the ages. Here we have Paul teaching eschatology to his disciples and it is important for us to see how simple he makes it. No two more comings of Christ, no two more resurrections, no 7 year Great Tribulation, no 1000 year Millennium.

From verse 23 he begins to explain the order of how and when the resurrection and the Second Coming takes place:

"But every man in his own order; Christ the firstfruits, afterwards they that are Christ's at his coming. Then comes the end when he shall have delivered up the Kingdom to God even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power. For he must reign till he hath put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death." (1 Cor. 15:23-26)

Now let's unpack these very important verses. Firstly you must understand that Paul is grounding his teaching in the scripture, this was not just his imagination. Psalm 110:1 says "The Lord said unto my Lord, sit thou at my right hand until I make thine enemies thy footstool."

Paul is describing three separate events in logical order which consist of (1) the first resurrection when Christ rose from the dead, (2) then He ascended into heaven and started His rule to put down all authorities and powers and then (3) when He is finished He returns and resurrects the dead.

The First...

"Christ the firstfruits". This was the first resurrection when Jesus rose from the dead and He cleared out paradise and took the Old Testament saints into heaven. Math. 27:52-53 confirms this and says, *"and the graves were opened and many of the bodies of the saints which slept arose, and came out of the graves after his resurrection and went into the holy city and appeared unto many."*

The Second...

The reign of Christ: which we are now in where

Jesus is seated at the right hand of the Father after His resurrection and conquering all His enemies through His mighty church to whom He has given power to tread on Satan and his demons and to destroy all the works of the enemy. Please note that He is not said to be ruling from an earthly Jerusalem for a thousand years one day in the future. His reign began with His first resurrection and He is now ruling from the throne of God!

The Third...

"Then comes the end", when He has put all His enemies under His feet the end comes and He returns triumphant, the King of Kings and Lord of Lords and He comes to fetch us and conquers the last enemy death by raising the dead from the grave at His Second Coming. He then presents the Kingdom to the Father.

Does this line up with our foundation truth I told you to build your eschatology on? Yes it does. But what about the Rapture? Paul explains it further in this same chapter how "we shall be changed in the twinkling of an eye".

Paul's Rapture Explanation

In verse 35 he notes a further question some of the Corinthians have, *"and some will say, how are the dead raised up and with what body do they come?"* Paul now goes into a lengthy explanation from verses 36-49 explaining that there are earthly bodies and there are heavenly bodies and that the Lord will give us real glorious heavenly bodies in the resurrection. He concludes his arguments with this statement in verse 50, *"for flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, neither doth corruption inherit incorruption."*

But now comes an obvious objection, but before his Greek believers can make this objection Paul answers the objection from verse 51. The unstated objection is this: Ok Paul, I accept what you say that the dead will be raised at the Second Coming of Christ and that they will be given new glorious heavenly bodies to enter heaven but not everyone will be dead when Christ returns, there will still be many multitudes alive on earth when He returns, all

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living in earthly corrupt bodies; how are they to enter heaven with their mortal bodies without dying first?

And this is how Paul answers in verses 51-52, *“Behold I show you a mystery, we shall not all sleep (we are not all going to die), but we shall all be changed (we are all going to get heavenly bodies even if we have not died yet). 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 (those not dead will be changed into heavenly bodies).”*

Can you see that Paul is describing the Rapture here. Everyone actually agrees this is a description of the Rapture. So when does the Rapture take place according to Paul? It takes place at the Second Coming of Christ when Christ raises the dead and those alive on the earth are changed in the twinkling of an eye. And when does the Second Coming occur? Paul says after Christ has reigned and put down all powers and all authorities, then comes the end. So does the rapture come before Christ begins His reign? No, not according to Paul, it happens “at the end” when Christ has finished conquering all His enemies.

The Thessalonian Teaching

Now let’s look at that other famous rapture scripture of 1 Thes. 4:13-17 and see if it agrees with what we have discovered from Corinthians. *“For I would not have you to be ignorant brethren concerning those who are asleep (dead) that you sorrow not, even as others who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him. For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent (**precede**) them which are asleep. For the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trump of God. And the dead in Christ shall rise first; then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air and so shall we ever be with the Lord.”*

Can you see that there is no difference here between what Paul says to the Thessalonians and what he said to the Corinthian believers. Christ returns, the dead are raised and those not yet dead but that are alive on the earth when He returns are also transformed with the dead into heavenly bodies and meet the Lord in the air.

The only difference between the two is that with the Corinthian explanation he described **WHEN** the Second Coming was to be. He did not do that with the Thessalonians. And when was Christ to come again? After He has reigned in heaven putting down all His enemies, the last enemy is death, then comes the end when He comes back to take His saints, raise the dead and He hands the Kingdom over to the Father. There is no resurrection, rapture or Second Coming before the “Millenium”, it occurs after the reign of Christ when He is victorious over all His enemies.

But in 2 Thes. 2 Paul does give us another interesting clue as to when the coming of the Lord is going to happen. He says something very important must happen before the coming of the Lord.

“Now we beseech you brethren by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ (the Second Coming) and our gathering together unto him (the rapture), that you be not soon shaken in mind or be troubled neither by spirit nor by word neither by letter as from us that the day of Christ is at hand” (verses 1-2)...Here is what Paul is saying; don’t think that the rapture and the Second Coming is at any moment. Why?

Someone had written to the Thessalonians claiming to be Paul and scaring them saying the end was at hand, Christ is coming soon. This of course is a common occurrence today when every pulpit and TV program and prophecy book coming out saying, “it’s the end times Jesus is coming” because all the signs have been fulfilled. Paul had to calm them down by saying the following in verse 3:

“Let no man deceive you by any means (lots of deception still going on today with continuous false prophecies of the end times), for that day shall not come (the rapture and Second Coming

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of Christ) *except there come a falling away first and that man of sin be revealed the son of perdition.*" (the Antichrist).

Paul says here, don't worry the Rapture and Second Coming of Christ does not take place until there is first coming a great falling away and "the Antichrist" or "man of sin" is revealed. But every popular prophecy book that you read on the Rapture and the end times will tell you the exact opposite of what Paul just said to the Thessalonians. They all teach, first the Rapture to take us out of here and then comes the Antichrist and the Great Tribulation. Why? So we can escape the suffering to come. People love this kind of deception because who wants to hear bad news? But Paul is upfront about the bad news, he says there is coming a great falling away of Christians because of the deceptions and the sufferings. He warned us that we are in a fight with Satan and his followers and that with Christ as our head, we the Church, will destroy all the works of the enemy and then comes the end when Jesus returns triumphant. But people don't want to hear about the battles ahead, they want to hear about an easy quick escape out of here and let the Jews tackle the Antichrist.

The Parousia of the Lord

There is another coming of the Lord which we must not forget in the midst of all our studies on prophecy and signs of the times. In the New Testament the Greek word "parousia" is also used for the "coming" of the Lord. This word in New Testament times was used to denote "presence" or "arrival" or "presence after absence". The "parousia" of the Lord is His promise to every believer "I will not leave you comfortless, I will come to you." (John 14:18). Jesus promised all of His disciples through all the ages, "behold I am with you even to the end of the world." (Math. 28:20). The coming of the Lord for us therefore is not just an apocalyptic event at the end of time but a continuous present reality that the Lord has truly come to each of us. He is with us, we are not alone. This is the coming of the Lord in His saints and not just for his saints. For Paul says that the Lord is coming to be glorified in his saints. We are to walk daily in His presence, His "parousia". When two or

three of us gather together He is in our midst.

This concept of the coming of the Lord in His saints and His manifested presence now with us is crucially important for us in the battles ahead. Some would tell you that we are not able to defeat Satan in this world and that we must leave it till Jesus comes with His angels. But let me show you the power of this "parousia" in 2 Thes. 2:8:

"And then shall that wicked one be revealed whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming."

I am going to give you the real Greek words for "brightness" and "coming" and then see how it reads. "Brightness" is translated from the Greek word "epiphania" which means "manifestation" and of course "coming" is translated from "parousia". So here is a better translation: The Lord is going to destroy Satan through "the manifestation of His presence". Where is He going to manifest His presence? In His people. Who is going to destroy Satan? The Church of Jesus Christ manifesting the presence of Christ in this world. This manifestation of God's presence is only going to increase in His people and with that will mean an increase in our ability to destroy the works of Satan. This is our calling, this is our task and when we have finished that task, then the end will come. All other signs of "the end times" are deception that Paul warned you against.

So...

If Jesus prayed in John 17:15, "I pray not that thou takest them out of the world..." do you really think we are going to get taken out of this world? If Jesus said, "In this world you shall have tribulation" (John 16:33) do you really think you are going to escape tribulation? Many evangelicals are like Thomas who would not believe Jesus rose from the dead until he could touch him; today they will not believe that Jesus is actually now ruling until they see Him physically on a throne in Jerusalem. This is unbelief.

Jesus is now Lord, His Kingdom has come, His Church is triumphant against Satan and all his

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demons and He will return to resurrect the dead and rapture the living saints when the job is done and not before. Until then we have a job to do...even so come Lord Jesus.

Now let's line up the other wandering truths and see how they circulate around our essential truth of the Kingdom:

The Millennium: There is no future 1000 year reign of Christ, He is reigning now already. For how long? According to Rev.20 He reigns for "thousands of years" not "a thousand years", the original Greek word for thousand in Rev.20 is in the plural ("chilioi") not singular ("chilias").

The Rapture: It takes place exactly when Paul in 1 Cor.15 says it takes place, at the last trumpet, at the Second Coming, when Jesus returns and the dead are raised to life then those who are on earth who have not yet died will be changed in the twinkling of an eye along with the dead to receive a resurrection body and meet the Lord in the air.

The 7 Year Great Tribulation: There is no 7 year Great Tribulation. It comes from a wrong interpretation of Daniel 9:27

The End Times: The New Testament writers all believed they were living in "the last days" or end times. They were right, modern day prophecy writers are wrong. The "last days" meant the last days of the old Jewish Covenant order and it consisted of the generation living from 33 AD to the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple in 70 AD.

The Return of Israel: Yes, according to the prophecies of Ezekiel Israel was to return to

their land before the coming of Christ. This happened exactly 390 years after Ezekiel prophesied it to happen in 143 BC when Israel once again became an independent nation.

The Antichrist: Yes the Antichrist is supposed to appear before the Second Coming of Christ but it is not some European leader heading a world government during the Great Tribulation. The Antichrist did appear in the Temple of God (the church) proclaiming himself to be God and persecuted the saints for 1260 years as Daniel prophesied he would.

Armageddon: There is no Russian invasion of Israel coming. That is a faulty interpretation of Gog and Magog. The invasion of Gog into Israel from the north prophesied by Ezekiel 38 and 39 already happened in 37 BC. And Armageddon in 70 AD with the destruction Jerusalem by Rome.

The Book of Revelations: Every prophecy book tells you the church gets Raptured out at Rev. 4. Wrong, in chapter 16 of Revelations in the midst of the judgments on the earth Jesus still had not come for he says in verse 15, "Behold I come as a thief, blessed is he that watches..." and then all the way in Rev. 18 He is telling His people to get out of Babylon.

Jude 1:14 says the Lord comes with ten thousands of His saints, so surely He must come **for** His saints in the rapture before He can come **with** His saints at the Second Coming? Wrong. The "saints" referred to here mean "holy ones" which are the angels. See Deut. 33:2 "the Lord came from Sinai...with ten thousands of his saints (angels)". Jesus comes with His angels to fetch His saints!