

PROPHETIC TRUTHS FOR TODAY

Unveiling the End-Time Events

by

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CHAPTER NINE

CHRIST'S RETURN - THE LAST BEST HOPE OF EARTH

(John 14:3; Acts 1:11; Hebrews 9:24)

IT SHOULD be relatively easy for people in our day to believe in the personal return of our Lord seeing that finite man has succeeded in breaking out of the atmosphere and placing a human being in a capsule which has successfully orbited the earth many times. Surely the infinite Christ will be able to come in the manner set forth in Scripture! No Bible student can deny that Christ has made an appointment with His own, and this is clearly stated in the texts suggested above.

HISTORICAL CONCEPTS OF CHRIST'S COMING

Historically three main concepts have been maintained with reference to our Lord's return and the millennium. It is rewarding, I believe, for each of us to evaluate the theological positions held throughout church history.

The Premillennialists: This is the oldest view. It goes back to the early church and to the first century. Every New Testament book refers to Christ's return except two short personal Epistles, Philemon and the Second Epistle of John.

The early church was overwhelmingly premillenarian in its teachings. Even so great a church authority as Philip Schaff admits this. Clement of Rome wrote a letter to the Church of Corinth, in the year 97 A.D. He distinctly refers to the literal return of the Lord. Ignatius, the Bishop of Antioch, who lived in the first century, was an avowed premillennialist. Irenaeus, the Bishop of Lyons, who also lived in the second century, held a similar position. He was a friend of Polycarp, and as many of you know, Polycarp was a disciple of John. Tertullian, the towering figure in North Africa whose life-span covered a portion of both the second and third centuries, was a premillennialist. And Cyprian of the third century was a staunch believer in this view of Christ's return. We could extend the list, but the above should suffice.

A belief in a millennium, which will follow the second advent of our Lord, is the testimony of early Church history. In the fourth century, however, with the coming to power of Emperor Constantine the Great, the period of persecutions terminated. The Church was fused with the state. It was popularized and hence lost its pilgrim character.

In other words, it became a great external institution. And for the next twelve hundred years, as might well be expected, the hope of the literal return of Christ was not only dimmed but was practically eclipsed altogether. It is strange that professors in many of our present-day seminaries should ascribe the premillennial teaching mainly to Darby and Scofield. How clumsy or unrealistic can men become who ought to know Church history? In my library I have a book by one of the leading postmillennialists of this generation, who admits that the belief in a literal return of Christ before the millennium was a general concept held in the early church. One must appreciate this honest admission by a very able preacher of our time.

The Amillennialists: They are the next in order in regard to the historical development of the doctrine. This concept goes back all the way to Augustine of the fourth century. The amillennialists rule out a literal kingdom altogether. Historically this group has spiritualized prophecy. They visualize no literal kingdom for the earth at all. They believe that the only coming of Christ which may be expected is His coming for judgment and the bringing in of the final state. As we might expect, they hold to the one resurrection, not several, or a series. Regardless of the slight variations among these people, it may be said that amillennialists rule out a thousand-year period of glory for the earth.

The Postmillennialists: This view was introduced by Daniel Whitby of Britain in the 17th century. It has persisted, and was especially formidable after the turn of the century with the exceptionally bright world situation up to 1914. In recent decades, following a series of catastrophic events on earth, most of the postmillennialists have gone in to oblivion as it were, and logically so because events and developments on this planet completely contradict their position. In a nutshell, it may be pointed out that the heart of their concept is that Christ will come after the Church has succeeded in winning over the world to Him by means of the universal influence of Christianity.

THE CASE OF THE PREMILLENNIALISTS

In the first place, one should believe in the imminent, premillennial coming because *Christ said He would come in that manner.*

It has been my policy in life to take a good man at his word. Christ said over and over again that He would come. This truth was made clear by Him in direct promises, in parables, and in other specific teachings. Since the Lord was never mistaken on any statement which He ever made, surely He would not be false or unreliable on this primary truth. Christ has made an appointment with His Church, and since He scrupulously kept all other appointments that He made, it would be most unkind of us to discount the appointment He made with reference to the Second Coming. His statement “**I will come again**” was specific and it is certainly couched in a literal phraseology.

In the second place, we find that *all the New Testament writers refer to His return.*

In only two small books, and these are personal letters, is the subject omitted. Careful Bible mathematicians have found 318 passages, or one verse out of every 25 in the New Testament, which refer to His return. In all the Gospels the doctrine is declared.

Likewise, as we read Acts and the Epistles, we see the truth emphasized over and over again. In Thessalonians Paul not only refers to the truth, but the order of the events in conjunction with His return is given in considerable detail.

- James says, **“The coming of the Lord draweth nigh.”**
- Jude declares, **“The Lord cometh with ten thousands of His saints.”**
- Peter, who puts the truth in a different manner, says, **“When the Chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away.”**
- John, who quotes Christ, in the last Book of the Bible, the Revelation, gives the truth in these words, **“Behold, I come quickly.”**
- And the last prayer of that book is anticipating His return, **“Even so, come, Lord Jesus.”**

Surely these 318 references in the 260 chapters of the New Testament make the case solid for the literal, personal return of our Lord. When we couple these passages with the teachings of both the Apostolic and the Church Fathers, it is less than realistic for anyone to ignore such an imposing array of testimonialists.

THE TRUE MEANING OF THE TERM, “THE LORD IS COMING”

It may be well to discuss negatively what it cannot mean because persistent efforts are made to give His coming a non-literal interpretation.

His Second Coming is not analogous with the death of the saints. Such an interpretation is not only scripturally unsound, but actually it is childish. When saints die there is no sound of a trumpet of God nor of the voice of the archangel; no graves are opened, and no company of living saints are raptured. All of these events must take place in conjunction with the Lord’s return.

Others say erroneously that His Coming was fulfilled in the destruction of Jerusalem in the year 70 A.D. But none of these phenomenal events took place at that historic time. The destruction of Jerusalem was a tragedy; it cost the death of at least one half million Jews (Josephus says over one million). And this tragic event led to the scattering of the Jews among the Gentile nations. We are admonished to comfort one another in the blessed hope. There could not possibly be any comfort in such a catastrophic event as that of the destruction of Jerusalem. None of the events stated in Thessalonians took place when Jerusalem was destroyed.

The third unrealistic concept regarding the meaning of the Lord’s return is the liberal explanation that it refers to His coming into human affairs, and the permeation of the ideals and teachings of Christ in the whole world; in other words, the triumph of right and justice. Harry Emerson Fosdick and Shailer Matthews and scores of other well known personalities have been committed to this explanation in connection with the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Still others feel His coming simply means the time when persons accept Christ as their Savior. This view is spiritualization on a rampage. The position is both illogical and unsound, since none of the remarkable events as portrayed by Paul takes place when men and women are saved.

No voice of the archangel is heard, no dead in Christ arise, and no living companies of saints are translated and raptured to meet the Lord in the air at the time people are saved.

Lastly, there are those who believe Christ's Coming was fulfilled on Pentecost when the Holy Spirit came to earth in a new and wonderful manner to empower the believers. Unfortunately this explanation is completely wrong, for Christ said, "**I will come again**" and the message as recorded in Acts 1:11 states, "**This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen Him go into heaven.**"

The trouble with these explanations, which have been enumerated, is that they violate the exegesis of the passages which point to our Lord's Coming.

HOW WILL CHRIST COME?

It will be a personal coming. Our Lord said, "**I go to prepare a place for you . . . I will come again . . .**" The apostle Paul declares this truth appealingly in the Book of Titus, "**Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of our great God and Saviour, Jesus Christ.**" The author of Hebrews writes, "**He shall appear the second time without sin unto salvation.**"

These promises listed above, and many others which could be added, point to a personal return of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Christ will come suddenly. It is not a gradual process as modernists would like to have you believe, namely, that of His coming into human affairs, more and more, and the diffusion of His teachings in ever wider spheres. Luke states it will be a swift return, "**For as the lightning, that lighteneth out of the one part under heaven, shineth unto the other part under heaven; so shall also the Son of man be in his day.**" It will be in a moment, "**in the twinkling of an eye**" (I Corinthians 15:52). We are admonished and alerted in these words, "**Watch, therefore, for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come**" (Matthew 24:42).

THE EFFECTS OF HIS COMING

The Lord's return will bring the culmination to the highest aspiration of His followers. He will come as a friend and benefactor to reward His own. Truly, He will come, not to upbraid, nor condemn, but to bless and exalt all who belong to Him. In fact, the coming will be like that of a bridegroom for his bride.

During the first year when I served as a pastor in Phelps County, Nebraska, I was a young bachelor. The one with whom I was engaged lived in Seattle, Washington. When the wedding day was announced the one who was to become my bride did not live in a dreadful anticipation of my coming. She might have had reasons for such a feeling, but they did not exist, as love is blind, they say. The wedding was the capstone and the climax of a delightful courtship. Christ is coming to unite the body with the head, He being the head, and the church, His body. This great day is known in the Scripture as the completion of our salvation, and rightly so, because we shall then realize immortality, glorification, and our eternal reward.

The effect of His coming upon the world will be completely opposite to that which has been described. His coming will bring into operation a sweeping judgment upon the whole earth, for in Matthew we read, **“He will thoroughly purge his floor”** (the earth).

A period of unprecedented judgments will sweep over the nation. His coming will remove the barrier which keeps Antichrist from entering the arena. It is the Holy Spirit which restrains the pressures of Satan. Paul writes to the Church of Thessalonica, When **“He be taken out of the way, then shall that wicked [one] be revealed.”** When the Church is removed the Holy Spirit no longer will maintain the restraint, and figuratively, one might say, the dam will give way and an avalanche of evil will engulf the whole earth.

And in the same chapter in Thessalonians the apostle says, **“God shall send them strong delusions that they should believe a lie.”** In other words, the inhabitants of the earth will be submerged by an unprecedented magnitude of delusions and false teachings of every kind. What we see in our time in the way of false teachings is mild in comparison to the delusions of the End-Times. His coming also will result in a great separation, one from which there will be no reunion.

Some of us remember the distressing moments of separation witnessed in the period of World War I and World War II. Yet in almost every case there was a hope of a return. Even those banished to Siberia have had a lingering hope of a final return home. When Jesus comes there will be the separation of the saved from the unsaved. The chaff will be separated from the wheat. Unbelievers will become detached from the company of believers.

A certain Jewish woman who was recently saved said to her husband, also a Jew, “If the Bible is true, you and I will separate.” The husband could not understand her words until she explained the truth of her acceptance of the Messiah as Savior, while the partner still was unwilling to receive Christ. Her words subsequently led to his salvation. In every community many will be left behind when Christ comes for His own. What a calamity and what a separation it will be! Since the delusions will engulf the earth, and the Holy Spirit will be absent in the manner that He now works, it will be practically impossible for Christ rejecters to be saved in the Great Tribulation.

IS THE LORD’S RETURN IMMINENT?

During the many years that I have served as a Bible teacher, I have never resorted to date-setting. This is highly improper and foreign to the scriptural teachings. But the Lord has given us certain leads or clues which will make it possible to identify the closing days of this age. While the Lord is depicted as one coming **“like a thief”** it is not true He will come in that manner to His Church. Paul writes, **“But ye, brethren, are not in darkness that that day should overtake you as a thief. Ye are the children of light, and the children of the day; we are not of the night, nor of darkness”** (I Thessalonians 5:4-5).

We are exhorted to watch and live in daily anticipation of His return.

Believers should be able to discern the signs of the times in which they live; in fact, our Lord admonishes us to do so. Following Napoleon's first involuntary exile to the small island of Elba in the Mediterranean, he said to his band of loyal followers in France, "I will be back when the violets bloom."

The following spring, real early, thousands of Frenchmen picked violets to place in their coat lapels; others who could not find the real violets made artificial flowers. Napoleon returned, not to win glory for France, but to meet his subsequent defeat at Waterloo, from which defeat he was exiled to St. Helena, never to return again to his native land. The point is, if people could wholly embrace the words of a finite military officer, how much more should not Christians accept at face value the pledge our Lord made that He would return!

The Lord gave the sign of the fig tree, its budding, as an indicator of His return. Truly no generation since the Lord ascended on high has seen the budding of the fig tree but our own. Some 2,100,000 Hebrews have returned to their ancient homeland during the last generation. This is a sign clear and precise pointing to the approaching end of the age.

Moreover, the Lord mentioned that the end-times would be characterized by wars and rumors of wars. In no period in the whole annals of history has this truth been more clearly manifested than in our age. The radio and televised programs refer regularly to this unsavory matter of war. Likewise most magazines and news analysts discuss daily the possibility of war. In some part of the earth the tension reaches a new high point each year.

Jesus referred to universal lawlessness, that "**iniquity shall abound.**" Every sane student of contemporary society knows that ours is the most lawless generation in all of human history. J. Edgar Hoover gives us the information that crime at all levels is gaining, and each year the percent of criminal activity is much higher than during the previous year.

Peter, who also deals with the end-times, refers to scoffers who will appear, and they are identified as those that deny the Lord who has bought them. They are increasing rapidly.

Often they sit as denominational leaders, seminary professors, editors of religious publications, etc., etc. We are rapidly moving to a time when there will be a world-wide rejection of evangelical positions. In a subsequent message I shall elaborate on this matter.

Paul writes about the great falling away of the latter days. His Epistles to the Thessalonians and to Timothy are prophetic, and our time is a complete verification of this trend. It will be climaxed at the time of Antichrist.

Our Lord referred to earthquakes in divers places. Those who are students of earth science have tabulated earthquakes for the past 600 years. Our century has witnessed more earthquakes than any preceding one, and not even two-thirds of the present century has been reached.

For the first time since the ascension of Christ are the great areas of signs in agreement. We refer to the Jewish sign, the Gentile nations, and the Church.

In this generation we have reached a remarkable correlation in that the prophetic signs have appeared in each of these areas. Our Lord reminded us in the words, “**When ye see all of these things, know that it is near, even at the doors**” (Matthew 24:33).

Christ’s return for His Church is the first major event in relation to the End-Times.

If the signs, which are daily directed to the remnant and not the Church, are appearing, it is certain the rapture is near, and our glorious gathering together unto Him.

~ end of chapter 9 ~

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