

# IS CHRIST COMING AGAIN?

by

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## CHAPTER FIVE

### THE RETURN, THE RESURRECTION AND THE RAPTURE

These three great words deserve each a separate and extended discussion. The only reasons, therefore, for trying to bring them within the limits of a single chapter exist in two circumstances.

- First, the discussion of the Kingdom, through which we have just passed, has involved very many of the features of both the Return and the Resurrection;
- secondly, Paul, by the pen of inspiration, links these all together in both logical and doctrinal order.

With that marvelous brevity which is the soul of inspiration, he presents them in five short verses: **“But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which 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 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”** (I Thessalonians 4:13-17).

This inspired statement is to the whole subject of the Return, the Resurrection, and the Rapture, what the architect's preliminary sketch is to the finished structure. In each instance it remains for the workers to fill in, and to fill up. A good student will, in a Spirit-led research of the Word, find material at hand for the completion of the great doctrines that Paul here briefly, yet boldly outlines. As the stones wrought into the temple of God were each ready for its place, requiring not the touch of the hammer, but rather, a perfect knowledge of the plans and careful placing, so the man who works on these great doctrines, with Paul's plan before him, will find no need to change, carve, or unnaturally constrain the sacred sentences of Scripture. When properly put together, they give perfect proof of the divine plan, and provide an unanswerable argument for premillenarians. Men have sometimes sought to set Peter, or Paul, or John against Jesus; but on this subject it will be seen that inspired servants and divine Lord speak together. In the presentation of these great themes to the Thessalonians, Paul speaks of the Second Coming, the First Resurrection, and the Supreme Rapture.

## THE SECOND COMING

*It is to be both literal and personal.*

To speak of the Lord's return as a mere figure of speech that is to know no literal fulfillment, is little less sacrilegious than the total denial of inspiration. To identify that return with the coming of the Holy Spirit, or with the experience of death, is to despise the Master's own differentiations. He was extremely careful to distinguish between the office of the Son and that of the Spirit.

- The Son was manifested in the flesh— **“The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us”** (John 1:14);
- The Spirit was contrasted with the flesh— **“That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit?”** (John 3:6).
- The Son's office was that of sacrifice and substitution— **“The good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep”** (John 10:11);
- The Spirit's office was that of illumination—instruction— **“But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you”** (John 14:26).
- The Son's personal absence from the earth He declared to be a necessity to the Spirit's appearance in the Church— **“It is expedient for you that I go away; for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send Him unto you”** (John 16: 7).

If the plain references to the return of the Lord do not involve a personal coming, language has lost its meaning. For the comfort of His disciples, sorrowing over His approaching departure, He said, **“If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again.”** In the same discourse He said, **“I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you.”** The angels that attended Him in the ascension said to the anxious onlookers, **“Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye looking into heaven? This same Jesus, who was received up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye beheld Him going into heaven”** (Acts 1:11).

It is little wonder, then, that Paul, writing to the Thessalonians, employs the phrase, **“For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God”**

There is not a hint in Scripture that the Lord is ever to be identified with death—which the Bible denominates an **“enemy”** to be eventually **“destroyed”** (I Corinthians 15:26). This attempt is, as Ottman suggests, a shift, by which some have sought to blunt the edge of Scripture. That Christ is representatively present in the world by the Spirit, no man disputes; but that there is another coming **“for which we look,”** a revelation of His presence, which **“every eye shall see”** is the contention of the Book. Our hymnology—than which no truer theology has ever been written—sets that hope to sweetest harmony; and yet to tear the expectation of a personal return out of your best hymn book would not leave it in such tatters as would be that more blessed Book—the Bible—when you had torn the same from its sacred pages.

*The time is indefinite; the event, imminent.*

**“But of that day and that hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father.”** But **“Be ye therefore ready also: for the Son of man cometh at an hour when ye think not.”**

It is little wonder that Paul—perfectly familiar with his Lord’s speech— should have written to Titus, concerning the grace of God, which had appeared, bringing salvation to all, **“Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ”** (Titus 2:12-13).

The wisdom of making this great event imminent, and the date of it indefinite, exists in the fact suggested by Baines, namely, that the disciples were to be so living in the hope of it, that they would not be surprised if it occurred, while not confidently dating it as to suffer disappointment in its delay. The argument that this event could not be **“at hand”** nearly two thousand years ago, and yet, so remote as time has proven it to have been, ignores alike the difference between man’s and God’s computation of time, and the transcendency of the event. If, with God, **“a thousand years are as a watch in the night when it is passed,”** we see no difficulty in the Spirit’s expression, **“the time is at hand”**

Again, the proportions of this event are such as to make that language not only permissible, but accurate. In the far West a carload of passengers were excited by the announcement, **“We are coming to Shasta; look!”** Windows were pushed up, men and women put out their heads, to behold that snow-capped peak, full before them. And yet, as one put it, **“I rode on and on, from a little after break of day until high noon, and still we had not reached its base; and when the western sun had dipped far toward the horizon, glancing backward, we beheld its bold, beautiful peak, glorious with the vesture of the sun.”** You could not have said that of a hill.

A hill a mile away is not at hand; but one hundred and fifty miles away, Shasta is **“at hand.”** The second appearance of Jesus, as compared with the most important of human events, is so splendidly transcendent that no wonder those seers, realizing something of its mighty significance, should have lost the sense of distance and time, and exclaimed, **“for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh!”** or else, speaking for that Spirit who does not measure time by minutes and hours, but rather as it relates itself to eternity, say, **“The Lord is at hand”** (Philippians 4:15).

*His coming will perfectly accord with prophecy.*

For some time there has been a discussion in the premillenarian ranks as to whether the “any moment” theory of the second appearance could be retained; one school contending that that is a necessity of the interpretation of Scripture, and another that we can certainly recognize the fulfillment of prophecy, and that some portions of this, not having occurred already, must come to pass before we see in the heavens the **“sign of the Son of Man.”**

This problem finds its solution in the very fact that the last letter of prophecy, named as preliminary to the Lord's appearance, may have its perfect fulfillment, and yet the most of professed Christian men fail so to mark the movements of time as to clearly recognize the perfecting of the divine plan.

When Jesus appeared the first time, how few there were that saw in the Babe of Bethlehem the completion of prophecy! The visit of the star-led men from the East and the inquiry of the song-surprised shepherds seem to have found an answer in the faith of Simeon and Anna and in the fears of the criminal Herod, but to have left unmoved multitudes of men that were supposed to be the great Scripture students of the day.

Again, the certainty of a lapse of time between the coming of Christ for His people and His coming to the earth with them, cannot be disposed of by dubbing it "a theory created to meet a difficulty of the premillenarian view."

In a previous chapter we have already seen that there are two comings described in the twenty-fourth of Matthew that are so absolutely unlike as to demand an explanation. That explanation is found in the fact that Christ comes for his saints (I Thessalonians 4:16, 17, and II Thessalonians 2:1); an appearance which is apart from "**the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all His saints**" (I Thessalonians 3:13), to take His throne and "**judge the world in righteousness**"; and, to this period the Tribulation seems unquestionably assigned. The conversion of the Jew is at its close, and the "**wars and rumors of wars, earthquakes,**" convulsions of nature, etc., both naturally and scripturally belong to the same time!

The full proof of these assertions we postpone to the discussion of the tribulation and the translation. But for the present, let the Word of the Lord Jesus instruct us, "**For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass away from the law, till all be fulfilled**" (Matthew 5:18).

Dr. Arthur Pierson tells us that in 1884, when the transit of Venus was occurring, some German scientists, at Aiken, S. C, had drawn an elliptical circle upon a great stone, from which they made their observations. Later, they presented a request to the city that this stone might remain undisturbed until one hundred and twenty years had passed and another transit of Venus had occurred, at which time the then-living scientists might make their observations and compare them with the work of 1884.

Pierson reminds us that 120 years is a long time; every throne will have been emptied of occupant after occupant, and the map of the world will have been made over; for aught we know the march of the millennium may have begun, but prompt to the day, the hour, the minute, the transit of Venus will be on. Such is the accuracy of science! But again and again the even greater accuracy of prophecy has been put past dispute.

Read Zechariah's description of the first appearance of Jesus in his triumphal entry into Jerusalem, "**Riding upon an ass, even upon a colt the foal of an ass,**" and remember this, that over seven hundred years intervened between the declaration and the deed.

Generation after generation had passed; almost countless kings had been born to the various thrones of the earth; the little sentence, for the most part, was forgotten by even Bible students; and yet, in perfect accord with the Word of God, it came to pass.

So it will be again when **“His feet shall stand upon Mount Zion,”** and **“His law shall come forth from Jerusalem,”** and His scepter shall extend **“from sea to sea and from the river unto the ends of the earth,”** **“for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it”**

### THE FIRST RESURRECTION

*It will be concurrent with the Saviour's appearance.*

**“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.”**

The word **“first”** here simply assigns the resurrection of the righteous dead—when **“the corruptible puts on incorruption”** to precedence over the marvelous change of the living saints—when **“the mortal puts on immortality.”** The rest of the sentence, however, makes the return of the Lord and the resurrection of the saints concurrent events—the latter the instant resultant of the former.

At the last trump that resurrection will occur **“in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye”** (I Corinthians 15:52). **“Then they that are Christ's at his coming”** (I Corinthians 15:23).

A. J. Gordon truthfully remarks, “Any doctrine of the resurrection dissociated from the Advent, must be false; . . . no atonement apart from the cross; no resurrection apart from the coming.” It is **“by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto him”** (II Thessalonians 2:1).

A writer tells of the old colored saint, father of a numerous family, who lived in northern Georgia in 1833, when the notable meteoric display, known as “the falling of the stars,” occurred. Being wakened by the noise and confusion in the street, he looked out from the window of his humble home, and seeing, as he supposed, the stars of heaven falling like snowflakes, he thought the end had come, and quickly roused his wife and children, saying: “De day ob de Law'd am at han!”

Hurrying them into the streets, where the scene was indescribable, the old man turned to his companion and said, “Ol 'oman, de Law'd am a comin'; and jis' you take de chil'un along up to de public squar' and stop dar till I come. I'se gwine down in de gaurdin' an' see old Massa git up, and jist as soon as he do, him and me'll come along up to de squar', and we'll all go up to meet the Law'd togedah!”

That man, incapable of reading the word for himself, had not listened to the reading and explanation of the Scriptures in vain. He knew the Saviour's reappearance would be the signal for the resurrection of every sleeping saint.

*It will be accomplished by the Saviour's voice.*

**“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.”**

It is doubtful if there be a great event of the future that has not already been enacted upon a small scale— an adumbration of that which is to come; it is equally to be questioned if there be a great truth that has not found its symbols in some circumstance of the past. The resurrection is no exception!

The resuscitations of the New Testament are the shadows of the resurrection. They were accomplished, every one, by the Saviour's voice.

- To the widow's son He said, **“Young man, I say unto thee, arise; and he that was dead sat up and began to speak”** (Luke 7:14-15).
- To Jairus' daughter, **“I say unto thee arise. And straightway the damsel rose up and walked”** (Mark 5:41,42),
- To Lazarus, who had lain four days in the grave, he cried with a loud voice, **“Lazarus come forth; and he that was dead came forth”** (John 11:43).

It is said that Calhoun was unwilling to die until they should bear him again to the Senate chamber that he might listen to Clay's voice once more—the voice he regarded as the most eloquent known to the tongue of man. But the voice of Christ will be so much more eloquent that by it the dying shall be revived and the dead quickened into life again. **“The dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God; and they that hear shall live.”**

*The resurrection will concern only the sleeping saints.*

**“The dead in Christ”** are all that are mentioned as having any part in this resurrection (I Thessalonians 4:16). The explanation is at hand. **“The rest of the dead lived not until the thousand years should be finished. This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection”** (Revelation 20: 5, 6).

It will require a more ingenious man than has yet employed tongue or driven pen to disprove the two resurrections of Scripture.

The number of instances in which the first and second resurrections are spoken of, the easy explanation of such passages as Daniel 12:2 and John 5:28, together with the meaningful phrase **“the resurrection from the dead,”** as employed in Luke 20:35, Philippians 3:11, Acts 4:2 — making the first resurrection clearly elective—form the chain of argument which such men as Baines, Blackstone, Gordon, Brooks, West and others—too numerous to mention—have forged on the anvil of the Word.

The translation of Daniel 12:2 by Tregelles,

“And many from among the sleepers of the dust of the earth shall awake. These (that awake) shall be unto everlasting life. But those (the rest of the sleepers who awake later) shall be unto shame and everlasting contempt,” instead of being “a theory created by a premillenarian to carry his point, and absolutely unknown to commentators,” as one writer at least contends, is approved by such eminent rabbis as Saadia Haggion and Eben Ezra and employed by some of the best commentators, while the refusal to let the word “**hour**,” in John 5:28,29, refer to at least as long a period as has already been covered by its use in John 4:23 and 5:25, reveals an indisposition to be convinced.

However, the utter absurdity of straining, or spiritualizing Scripture is only reached when one opponent of two resurrections comes to treat Revelation 20:4-6, and contends that the first resurrection, there spoken of, is not that of persons at all but of “principles,” an interpretation which, as one has already suggested, would present the spectacle of:

- “principles” being beheaded “**for the witness of Jesus**,”
- “principles” refusing to worship the beast,
- “principles” with foreheads and hands on which they decline to receive a mark,
- “principles” over “**which the second death hath no power**,” but which shall be “**priests of God and of Christ**.”

Following this to its logical conclusion, “**the rest of the dead**” must also be “principles,” so that we could have no resurrection of persons at all.”

It is no argument against the two resurrections to remind us that for centuries “reverent students of the Bible” knew nothing of it, any more than it is against the Great Commission, which, for the same length of time, was overlooked, neglected, and, when brought to light, ardently disputed.

But to accept this biblical doctrine is to receive an inspiration to holy living such as that which characterized Paul, who cutting loose from all things that bound him to the world, affirmed his willingness to count them all but loss, “**if by any means I might attain unto the resurrection from the dead**.”

## THE SUPREME RAPTURE

Returning to our preliminary sketch again, we find the apostle describing it in these words:

**“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.”**

Three features of the Rapture are here clearly suggested.

- It will be signalized by the re-wedding of body and spirit;
- It will be characterized by the change of the mortal and the corruptible,
- It will consummate the communion of the saints and the Saviour.

*It will be signalized by the re-wedding of body and spirit.*

The clear significance of the phrase **“even so also, them that are fallen asleep in Jesus will God bring with him,”** is to the effect that **“the spirits of just men made perfect”** are now with God. But their bodies lie buried in sea and on land. Our coming Christ will bring the spirits down with Him, and at the sound of his voice the graves shall give up their dead. And when the body and the spirit, divorced by the last enemy, meet in the presence of our Master, He, by His word, will so wed them together that neither man nor devil will ever again divide them asunder.

If one could conceive the glory that shall clothe these bodies of ours, when, redeemed from humiliation, they are **“conformed to the image”** of our Lord, and the splendor that shall mark our **“spirits”**— **“made perfect”**—he would somewhat realize the meaning of the eternal marriage of the two. This is the hour, and the event, of which the apostle wrote to the Romans— **“For the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God, . . . For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now; And not only they, but ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body.”**

It is little wonder, therefore, that an Old Testament prophet, who was speaking to quicken Israel— **“dead in trespasses and in sins”**—should have expressed the very thought that will characterize that glad hour when the voice of the Son shall proclaim the approaching rapture; and men shall know the more remote and more blessed meaning of Isaiah’s words, **“Awake and sing, ye that dwell in the dust, for thy dew is as the dew of the herbs, and the earth shall cast out her dead?”** (26:19).

We have read Ingraham’s *“Prince of the House of David,”* and have tried to imagine the joy of that marriage occasion when Lazarus, whose recent decease had thrown every participant into pitiful sorrow, now resuscitated, lends by his living presence, such surpassing happiness as no wedding party had ever before experienced; but we confess frankly that the joy of the hour when all perfected spirits and all glorified bodies shall be joined by the word of the Lord Jesus cannot be compassed by the imagination! RAPTURE! is the word.

*It will be characterized by the change of the mortal and the corruptible.*

**“The dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed; for this corruptible must put on incorruption; and this mortal must put on immortality. But when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying, Death is swallowed up in victory.”**

What an hour! At that moment those that have come out of their graves, in the full realization of their eternal conquest, will almost tauntingly ask of their defeated foe, **“Oh, death, where is thy victory?”** while those that have not slept, but, by the coming of Christ the Master, have put on their immortality, will voice their conscious triumph in the speech, **“Oh death, where is thy sting?”** and sing their joy in the sentence,

**“Thanks be to God who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.”**

Dr. Gordon’s comparison, “the charcoal and the diamond are the same substance; only that one is carbon in its humiliation and the other carbon in its glory; so is this tabernacle in which we now dwell, in comparison with our house which is from heaven,” is not only full of beauty, but biblically justified.

When, however, one comes to speak of the saints perfected in body, soul and spirit, there are no objects of earth with which to liken them. Jesus said, **“They are equal unto the angels and are the sons of God, being the children of the resurrection”** (Luke 20:36).

*It will consummate the communion of the saints and the Saviour.*

The phrase **“shall together with them be caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so shall we ever be with the Lord”** involves a two-fold communion—the communion of one with another, and of all with their Lord.

The closeness of that communion and the sweetness of that fellowship finds no expression sufficient, short of the marriage relation. **“They that were ready went in with him to the marriage feast”** (Matthew 25:10).

It is little wonder that on the consummation of this event there should be heard the voice of a great multitude as the voice of mighty thunder, saying, **“Alleluia: for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth; Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready”** (Revelation 19:6-7).

Samuel Rutherford, while languishing in prison at Aberdeen, divided his time between singing God’s praises and pleading for the reappearance of His Son, and we marvel not at his speech:

“O fairest among the sons of men;  
Why stayeth thus so long away?  
Oh, heavens move fast!  
Oh, time, run, run, and  
Hasten the marriage day!  
For love is tormented with delays!”

~ end of chapter 5 ~

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