

# PLAIN PAPERS ON THE LORD'S SECOND COMING

by

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## CHAPTER THREE

### THE DOUBLE BEARING OF THE FACT

Having, as we trust, fully established the fact of the Lord's coming, we have now to place before the reader the double bearing of that fact:

- Its bearing upon the Lord's people, and
- Its bearing upon the world.

The former is presented, in the New Testament, as the coming of Christ to receive His people to Himself; the latter is spoken of as "**the day of the Lord**" - a term of frequent use also in Old Testament Scriptures. These things are never confounded in Scripture, as we shall see when we come to look at the various passages. Christians do confound them, and hence it is that we often find "**that blessed hope**" overcast with heavy clouds, and associated in the mind with circumstances of terror, wrath, and judgment, which have nothing whatever to do with the coming of Christ for His people, but are intimately bound up with "**the day of the Lord.**"

Let the Christian reader, then, have it settled in his heart, on the clear authority of Holy Scripture, that the grand and specific hope for him ever to cherish is the coming of Christ for His people. This hope may be realized this very night. There is nothing whatever to wait for - no events to transpire amongst the nations - nothing to occur in the history of Israel - nothing in God's government of the world - nothing, in short, in any shape or form whatsoever, to intervene between the heart of the true believer and his heavenly hope. Christ may come for His people tonight. There is actually nothing to hinder. No one can tell when He will come; but we can joyfully say that, at any moment, He may come. And, blessed be His name, when He does come for us, it will not be with the accompanying circumstances of terror, wrath, and judgment. It will not be with blackness and darkness and tempest. These things will accompany "**the day of the Lord,**" as the Apostle Peter plainly tells the Jews in his first great sermon, on the day of Pentecost, in which he quotes the following words from the solemn prophecy of Joel, "**And I will show wonders in heaven above, and signs in the earth beneath: blood and fire and vapour of smoke: the sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before**" - what? The coming of the Lord for His people? Nay; but before "**that great and notable day of the Lord come.**"

When our Lord shall come to receive His people to Himself no eye shall see Him, no ear shall hear His voice, save His own redeemed and beloved people. Let us remember the words of the angelic witnesses in the first of Acts. Who saw the blessed One ascending into the heavens? None but His own. Well, **“He shall so come in like manner as ye have seen Him go into heaven.”** As was the going, so shall be the coming, if we are to bow to Scripture. To confound the day of the Lord with His coming for His Church is to overlook the plainest teachings of Scripture, and to rob the believer of his own true and proper hope.

And here perhaps we cannot do better than to call attention to a very important and interesting passage in the Second Epistle of Peter:

**“For we have not followed cunningly devised fables when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of His majesty. For He received from God the Father honour and glory, when there came such a voice to Him from the excellent glory, This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. And this voice which came from heaven we heard when we were with Him in the holy mount. We have also a more sure word of prophecy [or confirmed], whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts”** (II Peter 1:16-19).

This passage demands the reader’s most attentive consideration. It sets forth, in the clearest possible manner, the distinction between **“the word of prophecy”** and the proper hope of the Christian, namely, **“the morning star.”** We must remember that the great subject of prophecy is God’s government of the world in connection with the seed of Abraham.

**“When the Most High divided to the nations their inheritance, when He separated the sons of Adam, He set the bounds of the people according to the number of children of Israel. For the Lord’s portion is His people; Jacob is the lot of His inheritance”** (Deuteronomy 32:8, 9).

*Here then is the scope and theme of prophecy - Israel and the nations.*

A child can understand this. If we range through the prophets, from the opening of Isaiah to the close of Malachi, we shall not find so much as a single line about the Church of God - its position, its portion, or its prospects. No doubt the word of prophecy is deeply interesting, and most profitable for the Christian to study; but it will be all this just in proportion as he understands its proper scope and object, and sees how it stands in contrast with his own special hope. We may fearlessly assert that it is as utterly impossible for anyone to study the Old Testament prophecies aright who does not clearly see the true place of the Church.

We cannot attempt to enter upon the subject of the Church in this brief paper. It has been repeatedly referred to and unfolded elsewhere, and we can now merely ask the reader to weigh and examine the statement which we here deliberately make, namely, that there is not so much as a single syllable about the Church of God, the body of Christ, from cover to cover of the Old Testament. Types, shadows, illustrations, there are, which, now that we have the full-orbed light of the New Testament, we can see, understand, and appreciate.

But it was not possible for any Old Testament believer to see the great mystery of Christ and the Church, inasmuch as it was not revealed.

The inspired apostle expressly tells us that it was “**hid**,” not in the Old Testament Scriptures, but “**in God**,” as we read in Ephesians 3:9, “**And to make all men see what is the fellowship [or rather the administration] of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ.**” So also in Colossians we read, “**Even the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to His saints**” (Colossians 1:26).

These two passages establish the truth of our statement beyond all question, for those who are willing to be governed absolutely by the authority of Holy Scripture; they teach us that the great mystery - Christ and the Church - is not to be found in the Old Testament. Where have we in the Old Testament a word about Jews and Gentiles forming one body, and being united by the Holy Ghost to a living Head in Heaven? How could such a thing possibly be, so long as “**the middle wall of partition**” stood as an insuperable barrier between the circumcised and the uncircumcised? If one were asked to name a special feature of the old economy he would at once reply, “The rigid separation of Jew and Gentile.” On the other hand, if he were asked to name a special feature of the Church, or Christianity, he would as readily reply, “The intimate union of Jew and Gentile in one body.”

In short, the two conditions stand in vivid contrast, and it was wholly impossible that both could hold good at the same time. So long as the middle wall of partition stood, the truth of the Church could not be revealed; but the death of Christ having thrown down that wall, the Holy Ghost descended from Heaven to form the one body, and link it, by His presence and indwelling, to the risen and glorified Head in the heavens. Such is the great mystery of Christ and the Church, for which there could be no less a basis than accomplished redemption.

Now we entreat the reader to examine this matter for himself. Let him search the Scriptures to see if these things be indeed true. This is the only way to get at the truth. We must lay aside all our own thoughts and reasonings, our prejudices and predilections, and come like a little child, to the Holy Scriptures. In this way we shall learn the mind of God on this most precious and interesting subject. We shall find that the Church of God, the body of Christ, did not exist, as a fact, until after the resurrection and ascension of Christ, and the consequent descent of the Holy Ghost on the day of Pentecost. And further, we shall find that the full and glorious doctrine of the Church was not brought out until the days of the apostle Paul. (Compare Romans 16:25, 26; Ephesians 1-3; Colossians 1:25-29.) Finally, we shall see that the actual and unmistakable boundary lines of the Church’s earthly history are Pentecost (Acts 2) and the rapture or taking up of the saints (I Thessalonians 4:13-17).

Thus we reach a position from which we can get a view of the Church’s proper hope; and that hope is, most assuredly, “**the bright and morning star.**” Of this hope the Old Testament prophets utter not a syllable. They speak largely and clearly of “**the day of the Lord**” - a day of judgment upon the world and its ways (see Isaiah 2:12-22 and parallel Scriptures). But “**the day of the Lord**,” with all its attendant circumstances of wrath, judgment, and terror, must never be confounded with His coming for His people.

When our blessed Lord comes for His people there will be nothing to terrify. He will come in all the sweetness and tenderness of His love to receive His loved and redeemed people to Himself. He will come to finish up the precious story of His grace.

**“To them that look for Him shall He appear the second time, without** [that is, apart from all question of] **sin, unto salvation”** (Hebrews 9). \*

**\* The clause, “them that look for Him,” refers to all believers. It does not mean, as some suppose, those only who hold the truth of the Lord’s second coming. This would make our place with Christ at His coming dependent upon knowledge, instead of upon our union with Him by the presence and power of the Holy Ghost. The Spirit of God, in the above passage, most graciously takes for granted that all God’s people are looking, in some way or another, for the precious Saviour; and verily so they are. They may not see eye to eye as to all the details. They may not all enjoy equal clearness of view or depth and fulness of apprehension; but, most surely, they would all be glad at any moment to see the One who loved them and gave Himself for them.**

*He will come as a bridegroom to receive the bride; and when He thus comes none but His own shall hear His voice or see His face.*

If He were to come this very night for His people - and He may, for aught we know - if the voice of the archangel and the trump of God were to be heard tonight, then all the dead in Christ - all who have been laid to sleep by Jesus - all the saints of God, both those of Old Testament and New Testament times, who lie sleeping in our cemeteries and graveyards, or in the ocean’s depths - all these would rise from their temporary sleep. All the living saints would be changed in a moment, and all would be caught up to meet their descending Lord, and return with Him to the Father’s house. (John 14:3; I Thessalonians 4:16, 17; I Corinthians 15:51-52).

*This is what is meant by the rapture or catching up of the saints, and has nothing to do directly with Israel or the nations.*

It is the distinct and only proper hope of the Church; and there is not so much as a single hint of it in the entire Old Testament. If anyone asserts that there is, let him produce it. If there be such a thing, nothing is easier than to furnish it. We solemnly and deliberately declare there is no such thing. For all that respects the Church - its standing, its calling, its portion, its prospects - we must turn to the pages of the New Testament, and, of those pages, mainly the Epistles of Paul.

To confound **“the word of prophecy”** with the hope of the Church is to damage the truth of God, and mislead the souls of His people. That the enemy has succeeded in doing all this, throughout the length and breadth of the professing Church is, alas! Too true. And hence it is that so very few Christians have really Scriptural thoughts about the coming of their Lord. They are looking into prophecy for the Church’s hope - they confound **“the Sun of righteousness”** with **“the morning Star”** - they mix up the coming of Christ for His people, and His coming with them - they make His **“coming”** or **“state of presence”** to be identical with His **“appearing”** or **“manifestation.”**

*All this is a most serious mistake, against which we desire to warn our readers.*

- When Christ comes with His people, **“every eye shall see Him.”**
- When He is manifested, His people will be manifested also. **“When Christ our life shall appear [or be manifested], then shall ye also appear with Him in glory”** (Colossians 3:4).
- When Christ comes to execute judgment, His saints come with Him. **“Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousand of His saints, to execute judgment upon all”** (Jude 14, 15).

So also in Revelation 19, the rider on the white horse is followed by the armies in Heaven upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, white and clean. These armies are not angels, but saints; for we do not read of angels being clothed in white linen, which is expressly declared, in this very chapter to be “the righteousness of saints” (ver. 8).

Now, it is most evident that, if the saints accompany their Lord when He comes in judgment, they must be with Him previously. The fact of their going to Him is not presented in the book of Revelation, unless it be involved - as we doubt not it is - in the catching up of the man child, in chapter 12. The man child is, most surely, Christ; and inasmuch as Christ and His people are indissolubly joined in one, they are most completely identified with Him; blessed for ever be His holy and precious name!

But, clearly, it does not at all lie within the scope of the book of Revelation to give us the coming of Christ for His people, or their being caught up to meet Him in the air, or their return to the Father’s house.

For these blessed events or facts, we must look elsewhere, as, for example, in John 14:3; 1 Corinthians 15:23, 51, 52; 1 Thessalonians 4:14-17. Let the reader ponder these three passages. Let him drink into his very soul their clear and precious teaching. There is nothing difficult about them, no obscurity, no mist or vagueness whatever. A babe in Christ can understand them. They set forth in the clearest and simplest possible manner, the true Christian hope, which - we repeat it emphatically, and urge it upon the reader as the direct and positive teaching of Holy Scripture - is the coming of Christ to receive His people, all His people, to Himself, to take them back with Him to His Father’s house, there to remain with Him, while God deals governmentally with Israel and the nations, and prepares the way, by His judicial actings, for bringing in the First-begotten into the world.

Now, if it be asked, “Why have we not the coming of Christ for His people in the book of Revelation?” Because that book is pre-eminently a book of judgment - a governmental, judicial book, at least chapter 1 to 20. Hence even the Church is presented as under judgment. We do not see the Church in chapters 2 and 3 as the body or the bride of Christ; but as a responsible witness on the earth, whose condition is being carefully examined and rigidly judged by Him who walks amongst the candlesticks. It would not, therefore, comport with the character or object of this book to introduce, directly, the rapture of the saints. It shows us the Church on the earth, in the place of responsibility. This it gives us, in Revelation 2 and 3, under the head of **“the things that are.”**

*But from that to Revelation 19, there is not a single syllable about the Church on earth.*

The plain fact is, the Church will not be on earth during that solemn period. She will be with her Head and Lord, in the divine retirement of the Father's house. The redeemed are seen in Heaven, under the title of the twenty-four crowned elders, in chapters 4 and 5. There, blessed be God, they will be, while the seals are being opened, the trumpets sounded, and the vials poured out. To think of the Church as being on the earth, from Revelation 6-18 - to place her amid the apocalyptic judgments - to pass her through "**the great tribulation**" - to subject her to "**the hour of temptation which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth**" - would be to falsify her position, to rob her of her chartered privileges, and to contradict the clear and positive promise of her Lord. \*

**\* We shall have occasion, in a future paper, to show that, after the Church has been removed to Heaven, the Spirit of God will act both among the Jews, and also among the Gentiles. See Revelation 7.**

No, no, beloved Christian reader; let no man deceive you, by any means. The Church is seen on earth in Revelation 2 and 3. She is seen in Heaven, together with the Old Testament saints, in Revelation 4 and 5. We are not told, in the Revelation, how she gets there; but we see her there, in high communion and holy worship; and then, in Revelation 19, the rider on the white horse comes forth, with His saints, to execute judgment upon the beast and the false prophet - to put down every enemy and every evil, and to reign over the whole earth for the blissful period of a thousand years.

Such is the plain teaching of the New Testament, to which we earnestly invite the attention of our readers. And let no one suppose that our object is to find an easy path for Christians in thus teaching, as we do most emphatically, that the Church will not be in "**the great tribulation**" - will not come into "**the hour of temptation.**" Nothing of the kind. The fact is, the true and normal condition of the Church, and therefore of the individual Christian, in this world, is tribulation. So says our Lord: "**In the world ye shall have tribulation.**" And again, "**We glory in tribulation.**"

It cannot, therefore, be a question of avoiding that which is our appointed portion in this world, if only we are true to Christ. But the fact is, that the entire truth of the Church's position and prospect is involved in this question, and this is our reason for urging it so upon the prayerful attention of our readers.

The great object of the enemy is to drag down the Church of God to an earthly level - to set Christians entirely astray as to their divinely appointed hope - to lead them to confound things which God has made to differ, to occupy them with earthly things - to cause them to so mix up the coming of Christ for His people with His appearing in judgment upon the world, that they may not be able to cultivate those bridal affections and heavenly aspirations which become them as members of the body of Christ. He would fain have them looking out for various earthly events to come between them and their own proper hope, in order that they may not be - as God would have them - ever on the very tiptoe of expectation, looking out, with ardent desire, for the appearing of "**the bright and morning Star.**"

Well does the enemy know what he is about; and surely we ought not to be ignorant of his devices, but rather give ourselves to the study of the Word of God, and thus learn, as we most surely shall, “*the double bearing*” of the glorious fact of the Lord’s coming.

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