

Chapter XXIX: The Second Coming of Christ

The New Testament clearly teaches us that the first coming of Christ will be followed by a second. Jesus referred to His return more than once, Matt. 24:30, 25:19; 26:64; John 14:3; angels called attention to it at the ascension, Acts 1:11; and the Epistles speak of it repeatedly, Phil. 3:20; 1 Thess. 4:15-16; 2 Thess. 1:7, 10; Titus 2:13; Heb. 9:28.

1. Great Events Preceding the Second Coming

According to Scripture several important events must precede the return of Christ.

a. The calling of the Gentiles. The gospel of the kingdom must be preached to all nations before the coming of Christ, Matt. 24:14; Mark 13:10; Rom. 11:25. This means that the nations as a whole must be so thoroughly evangelized that the gospel becomes a power in the life of the people, a sign that calls for decision.

b. The conversion of the full number of Israel. 2 Cor. 3:15 and Rom. 11:25-29 refer to a conversion of Israel, and the passage in Romans seems to connect this with the end of time. Some take these passages to teach that Israel as a whole, Israel as a nation, will finally turn to the Lord. It is more likely, however, that the expression "all Israel" in Rom. 11:26 simply refers to the full number of the elect out of the ancient covenant people. The whole passage does seem to imply that in the end large numbers of Israel will turn to the Lord.

c. The Great Apostasy and the Great Tribulation. The Bible teaches repeatedly that toward the end of time there will be a great falling away. Iniquity will increase, and the love of many will wax cold, Matt. 24:12; 2 Thess. 2:3; 2Tim. 3:1-7; 4:3-4. Wickedness crying to high heaven will result in a terrible tribulation "such as hath not been from the beginning of the world until now, no, nor ever shall be." Matt. 24:21. If those days were not shortened no flesh would be saved; but they will be shortened for the sake of the elect.

d. The coming of the Antichrist. The spirit of Antichrist was already in evidence in the apostolic age, 1 John 4:3, and many antichrists had made their appearance, 1 John 2:18.

But the Bible leads us to expect that at the end of the age a single individual will stand out as the incarnation of all wickedness, “the man of sin,” “the son of perdition, he that opposes and exalts himself against all that is called God or that is worshipped; so that he sits in the temple of God, setting himself forth as God.” 2 Thess. 2:3-4.

e. Signs and wonders. The Bible also refers to striking signs as marking the beginning of the end. There will be wars, famines, and earthquakes in diverse places, which are called the beginning of travail, to be followed by the rebirth of the universe; and also fearful portents in heaven, when the powers of the heavens will be shaken, Matt. 24:29-30; Mark 13:24-25; Luke 21:25-26.

2. The Second Coming Itself

After these signs the Son of Man will be seen coming on the clouds of heaven.

a. The time of His Coming. Some believe that the coming of Christ is imminent, that is, may now occur at any time. But the Bible teaches us that the events and signs mentioned in the foregoing must precede the return. From God’s point of view the coming is always near, Heb. 10:25; Jas. 5:9; 1Pet. 4:5; but no one can determine the exact time, not even the angels nor the Son of Man, Matt. 24:36.

b. The manner of His Coming. The person of Christ will return. He has already come in the Spirit on the day of Pentecost, but He will return in the body, so that He can be seen, Matt. 24:30; 26:64; Acts 1:11; Titus 2:13; Rev. 1:7. Though several signs will precede His coming, yet it will be unexpected and take people by surprise, Matt. 24:37-44; 25:1-12; 1 Thess. 5:2-3; Rev. 3:3. Moreover, it will be a glorious and triumphant coming. The clouds of heaven will be His chariot, Matt. 24:30, the angels His bodyguard, 2 Thess. 1:7, the archangels His heralds, 1 Thess. 4:16, and the saints of God His glorious retinue, 1 Thess. 3:13; 2 Thess. 1:10.

c. The purpose of His Coming. Christ will return to introduce the future age, the eternal state of things, and will do this by two mighty events, the resurrection and the final judgment, John 5:25-29; Acts 17:31; Rom. 2:3-16; 2 Cor. 5:10; Phil. 3:20-21; 1 Thess. 4:13-17; 2 Pet. 3:10-13; Rev. 20:11-15; 22:12

3. The Question of the Millennium

Some believe that the second coming of Christ will either be preceded or followed by a millennium.

a. Post-millennialism. Post-millennialism teaches that the second coming of Christ will follow the millennium. The millennium is expected during the gospel dispensation, in which we are now living, and at the end of which Christ will appear. The expectation is that the gospel will in the end become much more effective than it is at present and will usher in a period of righteousness and peace and of rich spiritual blessings. In our days some even expect that this will be the grand result of a purely natural process of evolution. This whole idea, however, does not seem to fit in with what the Bible tells us respecting the great apostasy toward the end of time.

b. Pre-millennialism. According to Pre-millennialism Christ at His return will re-establish the kingdom of David on earth, and will reign at Jerusalem for a thousand years. This theory is based on a literalistic interpretation of the prophets and of Rev. 20:1-6. It makes the kingdom of God an earthly and national kingdom, while the New Testament represents it as spiritual and universal, a kingdom that is even now in existence, Matt. 11:12; 12:28; Luke 17:21; John 18:36-37; Col. 1:13. The New Testament knows nothing of such an earthly and temporal kingdom of Christ, but does speak of His heavenly (2Tim. 4:18) and eternal (2 Pet. 1:11) kingdom. Moreover, this theory seeks its main support in a passage (Rev. 20:1-6), which represents a scene in heaven, and makes no mention of the Jews, of an earthly and national kingdom, nor of the land of Palestine, as the place where Jesus will rule.

To Memorize. Passages pertaining to:

a. The calling of the Gentile:

Matt. 24:14. "And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world for a testimony unto all the nations; and then shall the end come."

Rom. 11:25-26a. "For I would not, brethren, have you ignorant of this mystery, lest ye be wise in your own conceits, that a hardening in part hath befallen Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in; and so all Israel shall be saved."

b. The conversion of Israel:

Rom. 11:26. Cf. above under a.

2 Cor. 3:15-16. "But unto this day, whensoever Moses is read, a veil lies upon their heart. But whensoever it shall turn to the Lord, the veil is taken away."

c. The Great Apostasy and the Great Tribulation:

Matt. 24:9-13. "Then shall they deliver you up unto tribulation, and shall kill you: and ye shall be hated of all the nations for my name's sake. And then shall many stumble, and shall deliver up one another, and shall hate one another. And many false prophets shall arise, and shall lead many astray. And because iniquity shall be multiplied, the love of the many shall wax cold. But he that endures to the end, the same shall be saved."

Matt. 24:21-22. "For then shall be great tribulation, such as hath not been from the beginning of the world until now, no, nor ever shall be. And except those days had been shortened, no flesh would have been saved: but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened."

d. The revelation of the Antichrist:

2 Thess. 2:8-9. "And then shall be revealed the lawless one, whom the Lord Jesus shall slay with the breath of his mouth, and bring to nought by the manifestation of his coming; even he, whose coming is according to the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders."

1 John 2:18a, 22. "Little children, it is the last hour: and as ye heard that antichrist cometh, even now have there arisen many antichrists... Who is the liar but he that

denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist, [even] he that denies the Father and the Son.”

e. The Second Coming of Christ:

Matt. 24:44. “Therefore be ye also ready; for in an hour that ye think not the Son of Man cometh.”

Phil. 3:20. “For our citizenship is in heaven; whence also we wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.”

Titus 2:13. “Looking for the blessed hope and appearing of the glory of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ.”

For Further Study:

a. How would you explain the passages that speak of the coming of Christ as near?

Matt. 16:28; 24:34; Heb. 10:25; Jas. 5:9; 1 Pet. 4:5; 1 John 2:18.

b. Who are the “false Christs” or “antichrists,” of which the Bible speaks, Matt. 24:24; 1 John 2:18?

c. What would you say in reply to the idea that the second coming of Christ belongs to the past, since He returned in the Spirit, John 14:18, 28.

Questions for Review:

1. What great events will precede the second coming of Christ?
2. In what sense must the nations be evangelized?
3. How must we understand the predicted conversion of Israel?
4. What is the great apostasy and the great tribulation?
5. What does the Bible mean when it speaks of the Antichrist?

6. In what sense are there antichrists even now?
7. What signs will precede the second coming?
8. In what sense can it be regarded as near?
9. Can we regard the second coming as a past event? If not, why not?
10. Can you prove that it will be physical and visible?
11. How can it be sudden, when it will be preceded by signs?
12. What will be the purpose of Christ's return?
13. What is the difference between post- and pre-millennialism?
14. What objections are there to these theories?