

The Coming of the Lord

“May your spirit and soul and body be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Thes. 5:23). As a career teacher of God’s word, I had to pass over Paul’s prayer and numerous other references to the imminent coming of the Lord without explanation, for I had none. Was he praying that their bodies be kept healthy for two thousand years or more? Was he misguided in his prayer? Or, was my traditional concept of Christ’s coming misguided? The same event, the coming of the Lord, cannot be imminent at two different times separated by two thousand years. He did not say, “at one of the comings of the Lord,” as though there would be two.

Perhaps, the most consistent message we are hearing these days from the various Christian groups is the supposed imminent return of Christ. From my use of *supposed* here, you may rightly discern that this treatise will not promote that concept. For some time, I have wanted to address this subject, but other themes have crowded it out, and I have not had time to really study it. We will look at passages indicating that all the prophecies concerning the coming of Christ have been fulfilled – preterist eschatology, or realized eschatology.

If you have already studied this and have your ideas fixed, just skip this page. If you have been warned about “A. D. 70” theories but have given little attention to them, you may still want to check them out for yourself. This will be more an effort to provoke restudy of the subject than to offer conclusive answers. My aim here is to present thoughts concisely for general reading while also opening the way for more private investigation.

Learning to format sixteen columns of this mailout on this computer has been no little trick for this old dog to learn. I have found that, if I have it all laid out as I want it and then need to insert a sentence, it affects the rest of the layout. Everything shifts. There is temptation to make no changes so as to avoid disturbing the format.

Our thinking is like that. We get doctrinal answers laid out in our minds – even with gaps here and there. Then when we change our belief on a certain point, it affects many related conclusions. So we may be tempted not to disturb our layout rather than to format it again.

In intend to throw out some inconclusive ideas about the coming of the Lord for you to try to insert in your mental programming. Some may be startling, but they are not life-or-death matters. Just work on it for yourself without fear.

The Greek word *parousia* in the texts we will be studying means *coming*, not only *arrival*, but also *presence*. It can refer to a point in time or a duration of presence. So when we read of Jesus’ coming, it may mean *the point of his arrival or the duration of his presence*. He returned about A.D. 70 and is still here.

The Old Testament history deals primarily with the people chosen by God through whom the Messiah would come. God dealt with them nationally. Many individuals accepted Christ, but as a nation they rejected Jesus and his spiritual kingdom. God no longer deals with nations but individuals. Because of their national rejection, a special dissolution of their nation would come in the lifetime of many of those who heard Jesus teach. It would happen about forty years after his crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension. This period would be the *last days*, the end of the age (sometimes erroneously translated *the end of the world*), a time of judgment, the great and terrible day of the Lord, the end

of the Jewish system, and the confirmation of the spiritual kingdom. All the many passages indicating the imminent coming of the Lord or day of the Lord were fulfilled in this period of time. We will now identify some of these numerous references briefly for your further study.

Let's begin with the last book of the Old Testament. Malachi was a prophet of doom who cried out against the deplorable moral and spiritual state of Israel. He warned that the Lord would come in judgment, lamenting, "*But who may abide the day of his coming? And who shall stand when he appears?*" (3:2; 3:5; 4:1). This does not describe his coming by birth, which was a coming in peace.

Malachi also says, "*Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the Lord*" (4:5). This connects John the Baptist with "the great and terrible day of the Lord." (Matt. 11:14; 17:10-13; Luke 1:17; 1:76f). John heralded not only the coming Savior but also the coming Judge whose judgment was impending (Matt. 3:12), not hundreds of years in the future.

When John declared that "*the kingdom of heaven is at hand*" (Matt. 3:2), he was not saying that the Messiah was about to appear for Jesus preached the same thing later (4:17), and so did the apostles (10:7). They pointed to something even beyond Jesus' birth and Pentecost, as we shall observe, but it would come upon that generation rather than in the distant future (Matt. 12:38-45; compare Luke 11:16, 24-36).

Jesus called for personal repentance of those present lest they perish, not just spiritually, in the coming judgment on the nation (Luke 13:1-9). The parable of the barren fig tree warned of national doom of an unrepentant nation (Luke 13:6-9). The end of the age, the last days of the Jewish system, is depicted in the parables of the tares and the dragnet at the coming of the Lord in judgment against them (Matt. 13:36-47). This involved those present, for Jesus himself sowed the good seed in his preaching, and some of those rejected would plead that they had eaten and drunk in his presence as he taught in their streets.

John the Baptist predicted an impending judgment so near that the axe was lying at the root of the tree. The catastrophic great and dreadful day of the Lord was to follow the coming of the second Elijah. It would be a time of individual judgment with the separation of the righteous and wicked and also the end of Judaism at the coming of the kingdom which was at hand.

The coming of the Son of man, the *parousia* would definitely be in the lifetime of the apostles (Matt. 10:23). Likewise, some of the disciples would be living when he would come in his glory with his angels to render judgment to individuals according to their works (Matt. 16:27-28; Mark 8:38; 9:1; Luke 9:26-27). It does not indicate that *all*, or even *many*, of his listeners would live until that time, but that *some* would. That keeps it in the range of events occurring about A.D. 70.

In the parable of the importunate widow, Jesus indicates that the coming of the Son of man was to be certain and speedy (Luke 18:1-8). The righteous would be avenged speedily, for it would be the "*day of vengeance*" (Luke 21:22). The reward of the disciples would be in the coming age at the *parousia* (Matt. 19:27-30; Mark 10:18-31; Luke 17:28-30).

The parable of the pounds is very significant (Luke 19:11-27). He gave this parable while on the way to Jerusalem for the final Passover before his crucifixion. He

seemed more concerned about the impending destruction of the nation than for his own approaching death. Along with this parable was his lamentation over Jerusalem (Luke 19:41), the cursing of the fig tree (Matt. 21; Mark 11), the parable of the wicked husbandman (Matt. 21; Mark 12; Luke 20), the parable of the marriage of the king's son (Matt. 22), the woes pronounced upon "that generation" (Matt. 23:29-36), another lamentation for the city (Matt. 23:37-38), and the extended prophecy on the Mount of Olives. These all relate to the Jews and the destruction of Jerusalem, the end of Judaism, and the dissolution of national Israel as the chosen people of God. It has been my practice through the years to try to milk present-day applications from these parables, but they were given for that generation of "the last days" of Israel.

Upon that generation would come the righteous blood of all of the innocent from Abel to Zechariah. Later, they would cry out to Pilate concerning Jesus, "His blood be upon us and our children." So, in his sorrowful lament over Jerusalem, Jesus declared concerning the house of Israel, "Behold, your house is forsaken and desolate" (Matt. 23:38).

The parable/allegory of the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19f) adds more meaning to this. Israel had fared sumptuously on God's special favor throughout their history. They relied on being the children of Abraham instead of living rightly individually. They disdained Gentiles, those far off and strangers to the covenant, the beggars for spiritual crumbs. But Jesus indicated a dramatic reversal in that the believing Gentile would be in Abraham's bosom while the rejecting Jew would be separated, far off, rejected, and beyond hope of reclamation. (For more, see Chapter 32 of *Free To Change*.)

Those parables and prophecies were about things to happen to that generation, not to people hundreds of years later. The people thought the kingdom of God would appear immediately. The parable of the pounds gives corrective illustration they could understand. It was like a man who was to be king but his kingly office was not yet recognized. He made a journey to the emperor to receive the authority, instructing his servants, "Occupy till I come." He receives confirmation of authority, returns, consummates his reign, and then deals judgment and vengeance on the rebellious citizens. So Jesus came to be king but did not immediately fill that capacity. He went to the far country, leaving his servants to "occupy till I come," and having his authority assured by the Father, returned for the confirmation of his kingdom and to render vengeance on the rejecting nation of the Jews. Some who heard him would live to see that kingdom come with power and the King's destructive judgment against Israel as was verified by history.

Matthew 24 is devoted to Jesus' prophecy given on the Mount of Olives. Most interpreters present it as a mixture of prophecies concerning the destruction of the Temple, the destruction of the world, the universal judgment, and the final dissolution of all things. They intermingle things thought to be immediate with those thought to be distant future, things that related to Jerusalem and the world at large, to Israel and the human race. Some give double meanings to some prophetic statements. Many assume that the disciples asked Jesus questions about three different events with "*When shall these things be?*" referring to the approaching destruction of Jerusalem, and "*What shall be the sign of your coming and of the end of the world?*" pointing to the end of the world. However, the word translated *world* here means *a period of time, age, or epoch*. *The end*

of the age referred to the end of the Jewish age or dispensation which was drawing close. The entire chapter deals with it. So do the *judgment parables* of Chapter 25. Parallel accounts are given in Mark 13 and Luke 21. Space here will not allow a commentary on these words of Jesus, but we will note that Jesus did state clearly, *“Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away till all these things take place”* (v. 34).

The coming of the Lord (*parousia*), that great and terrible day, was to be a time of judgment described in the three parables of Matthew 25. Only two days after giving those parables, Jesus assured the High Priest who judged him, *“But I tell you, hereafter you will see the Son of man seated at the right hand of Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven”* (Matt. 26:64; Mark 14:62; Luke 22:69). The High Priest did not have to wait for centuries to see that coming in judgment.

The marvelous thing about the penitent thief on the cross was his expectancy of Jesus’ soon coming in his kingdom (Luke 23:42) even when the disciples were not comprehending it.

Jesus, as reported by John, unsettles our format by relating the resurrection with his soon coming at the last day. He declared, *“Truly, truly, I say to you, the hour is coming, and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live”* (John 5:25). Consider these other similar statements. *“And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up at the last day”* (John 6:39-40; also 44). *“I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day”* (John 11:24-27. Note in vs. 27, *“he who is coming into the world.”*). Then Jesus adds the judgment to that setting, *“The word that I have spoken will be his judge on the last day”* (12:48).

These promises were made to the listeners personally rather than to indefinite people in the distant future. *“And when I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also”* (14:3). *“I will not leave you desolate; I will come to you. Yet a little while, and the world will see me no more, but you will see me; because I live, you will live also”* 14:18-19). *“I go away, and I will come to you”* (14:28). *“A little while, and you will see me no more; again a little while, and you will see me”* (16:16; also 22). Again, these promises were made to those present. Jesus intimated that the apostle John might live until his return (21:22).

For those addressed, to live until the *parousia* would exempt them from death. Paul revealed this mystery, *“We shall not all sleep (in death), but we shall all be changed..”* (1 Cor. 15:51). Paul included himself with that group (we) and with Thessalonian disciples as *“we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord..”* (1 Thes. 4:15).

We shall stop here for this time. No doubt, many red flags have popped up in your mind and the format of your understanding has not been revised yet. However, the thoughts I have presented may cause you to consider study for other than pre-formatted answers. I hope to add other passed-over references from *Acts* and the epistles at another time. Again, I am not giving you conclusive answers for I don’t have them, but I want you to study for yourself.

The things covered above are bits I have scanned from the first 140 pages of *The Parousia*, by James Stuart Russell, written and published in Scotland in 1878. This 561-

page book is thorough and surprisingly easy to read. It may be ordered from Kingdom Counsel, 122 Seaward Avenue, Bradford, PA 16701 for \$17.00 postpaid.

John Bray has just published a 43 page booklet (\$2.00), *The Rapture of Christians*, giving challenging explanations of the judgment and resurrection pointed to in the texts above as having already occurred at the coming of Christ, or the day of the Lord. His views shift the entire mental format without being destructive of faith. Out of curiosity, or to acquaint yourself with preterist eschatology, you may want to order a copy: John Bray Ministry, Inc., P.O. Box 90129, Lakeland, FL 33804. His 293-page *Matthew 24 Fulfilled*, (\$15.00), which some of you already have, is excellent also.

These sources can supply you with a list of much more available material about fulfilled prophecies. []