

**THE SECOND
COMING
OF CHRIST -
WHY, HOW, WHERE,
WHEN?**

By Barry C. Hodson

THE SECOND COMING OF CHRIST - WHY, HOW, WHERE, WHEN?

The return of Christ to planet earth is often referred to as “the second coming.” The reason for this of course, is because he came to earth on a previous occasion, as is evident from our reckoning of time in terms of B.C. (before Christ) and A.D. (anno domini which means “in the year of our Lord”).

Our history is dated from the first coming of Christ, but he is coming again, and his second coming will be the beginning of a new and exciting era and a new calendar.

The second coming of Christ has been proclaimed from the beginning of Bible history. It is not just a New Testament doctrine. Enoch, the seventh generation from Adam, made this declaration: “Behold, the Lord will come with myriads of angels, to execute judgement upon all, and to convict all who are ungodly of the ungodly deeds they have ungodly committed, and of all the harsh things which ungodly sinners have spoken against him” (Jude v14-15). Many of the Old Testament prophets proclaimed this.

As far as the Bible is concerned, the second coming of Christ is not a vague, unclear or uncertain subject. It is a major Bible doctrine, clearly taught time and again. There are 1527 direct and indirect references to it in the Old Testament, and 318 verses in the new Testament, which works out at one in every 25 verses.

Once upon a time the literal physical ascension of Christ to heaven and return to earth was put by some into the same category as science fiction, especially in the pre-aviation era. It was felt that it was inconceivable that a man could leave the earth and go out into space and then return again. But, as is often the case, science has proved that what was regarded as science fiction, can become scientific fact. Due to the advent of aviation and space travel, many men and women have ascended above the earth, travelled into space and even into a space city, not to mention the moon, and returned.

If man can do this by the power provided from the resources of the earth, then the God who created the earth and its energy resources, can certainly do it by the power of His Spirit!

WHY?

If it be asked: “Why is Christ coming back?” The answer is: to attend to unfinished business. Various prophecies and promises of God depend upon Christ’s return to be fulfilled. For example, the fulfilment of God’s promise to Abraham that he and his seed will inherit Canaan as an everlasting possession, necessitates Christ’s return.

The promise to David that his seed will sit upon his restored throne at Jerusalem and rule Israel and all other nations forever, also requires the second coming of Christ. Without the second coming, the kingdom of Israel which was the kingdom of God, would never be able to be restored. In other words, the kingdom of God in its ultimate universal form, along with the righteousness and peace that will go with it, would not be able to be established in the earth.

Also, because resurrection from the dead depends entirely upon the second coming of Christ, there can therefore be no life after death without the return of Christ. In view of this, it is not surprising that Christ’s return is referred to in Tit. 2:13 as “the blessed hope” of the Christian faith.

The second coming of Jesus is not only the Christian’s hope, but also the hope of the world, for without this hope, the world would ultimately be destroyed by man. The world does not want Christ, but it desperately needs him. Without him life is meaningless and hopeless, and the future would be very grim.

During his ministry, Jesus often referred to the fact that at the end of his earthly ministry he would go away, but he made it clear that he would return. He said: “If I go away, I will come again and receive you to myself, so that where I am (at Jerusalem) you may be also” (Jn. 14:1-3).

On one occasion when he was entering Jerusalem, the Jews thought he was going to restore the throne of David and establish the kingdom there and then. Because of this he told them that he firstly had to go on a journey to heaven to receive kingly power and then return to rule. He explained this in the form of a parable, saying: “A nobleman went into a far country to receive kingly power and then return ...” (Lk. 19:11-).

When the apostles asked Jesus what the signs of his coming would be, he warned that prior to his return, false teachers would claim that he had already returned and was hiding in the wilderness. He said: “Don’t believe it, for as the lightning flashes from the east to the west, so also shall the coming of the son of man be” (Matt. 24:23-27). There will be nothing secret, hidden, or concealed about the coming of Christ. It will be a very bright, glorious and earth-shaking event. It is referred to in 2 Thes.

2:8 as “the brightness of his coming.” We read in Rev. 1:7 that every eye shall see him: “Behold he comes with clouds, and every eye shall see him ...”

Revelation is the last book in the Bible and contains the last message of Christ to his church, and it is not surprising to find that he emphasizes that he is coming back (Rev. 2:25. 3:3, 11). In the very last chapter of this last book, Jesus affirms three times: “Behold, I am coming soon” (Rev. 22:7, 12, 20). And it is made clear in v12 that it will not be until he comes, that the Christians will receive their reward. Until he comes, their reward is in heaven with him, and it will come with him when he returns.

According to Jesus, the earth will be plunged into darkness just before he returns, and this will be one of the last signs of his coming. This is what he said: “The sun shall be darkened and the moon shall not give her light ... and then shall appear the sign of the son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn and they shall see the son of man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory” (Matt. 24:29-30).

The darkness of the earth will accentuate the brightness of his coming. The history of man’s mismanagement will therefore culminate in his darkest hour, causing widespread fear and panic. But Jesus shall arise like the sun and inaugurate a new era. Mal. 4:2 refers to this: “The sun of righteousness shall arise with healing in his beams.” Also Isa. 60:2-3: “For, behold, darkness shall cover the earth and thick darkness the people, but the Lord shall arise upon thee, and His glory shall be seen upon thee. And the nations shall come to thy light and kings to the brightness of thy rising.”

CAUGHT UP INTO THE AIR

Matt. 24:31 goes on to say that when Jesus comes, “he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four corners of the earth, from one end of the horizon to the other.”

When Jesus descends to Jerusalem, and his friends are in all parts of the earth, he is not going to ring them up or send them an e-mail telling them to book a seat on the next plane to Israel. No! He will send the angels who accompany him at his coming, to gather them up to meet him. The statement of Jesus in Jn. 14:1-3 which was quoted earlier, relates to this: “If I go away I will come again and receive you to myself, so that where I am, you may be also.”

The apostle Paul also related to this. He said: “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 who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in clouds to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord” (1 Thes. 4:16-17).

Elsewhere in Scripture we are taught that as the Lord descends from heaven to earth there will be “an hour of judgement,” during which the whole planet will be violently shaken, resulting in mountains tumbling down and the cities of the nations collapsing, causing huge loss of life. It would clearly not be appropriate for those who are godly and who belong to Jesus, for whom there is no condemnation (Rom. 8:1) to be upon the earth when it is shaken as a judgement of condemnation upon the ungodly. They will therefore be caught up into the air to meet Jesus as he descends while the earth is convulsed, and they will accompany him on the last leg of his descent to Jerusalem.

It is important to note that when Paul says we will be caught up to “meet” the Lord in the air, he did not say that the Lord will then turn around and ascend back to heaven where he came from, and take us with him. The Greek word “apanteesis” which is translated “meet,” does not convey this. It is a special word used in relation to a welcome party which goes forth from their city to officially welcome a newly arriving dignitary who is heading for their city.

A good example of this can be seen in Act. 28:15 where reference is made to Christians venturing forth from Rome to a market town about 60kms out of Rome called Appii Forum. They went there to “meet” (apanteesis) the apostle Paul who was heading for Rome. When they met him, he did not turn around and take them all back to where he had come from. No! They accompanied him on the last leg of his journey to Rome.

It will not be until Jesus comes, that he will sit upon the throne promised him - the throne of David at Jerusalem. Matt. 25:31 relates to this: “When the son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory ...”

PREACHED BY THE APOSTLES

When the importance of the second coming of Christ is understood and appreciated, it is not surprising to find that it formed an integral part of the gospel preached by the apostles. For example, Act.

3:19-21: “Repent ye therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord. And he shall send Jesus Christ, who before was preached to you, who the heaven must receive until the times of restoration of all things, which God has spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began.”

Among the 318 verses in the New Testament which teach the second coming of Christ, many of them are in Paul’s epistles. For example, 2 Thes. 1:7-10: “... the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. They shall be punished with everlasting destruction and exclusion from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power, when he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be marvelled at in all who believe ...”

There was no doubt in the mind of all the apostles that Jesus would come again and return to the earth. They never said that he “might” come or “possibly.” They were emphatic that he “will” come, as we read in Heb. 10:37: “For yet a little while, and he who shall come will come, and will not tarry.”

In the second epistle of Peter chapter 3, the whole chapter is devoted to the subject of the second coming of Christ. He warns that in the last days there will be a lot of scoffing scepticism towards the event. People will argue that a long time has passed since the second coming was first preached, and it still hasn’t happened; nothing has changed or will change. Things will continue on the same as always.

In reply to this Peter points out that such scoffers are ignorant of two facts. Firstly: there have been changes in history as a result of divine intervention and judgement. He gives the example of the flood in Noah’s day and could have given more examples such as the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. After referring to the flood, Peter then says the earth is ultimately destined to experience another judgement of similar severity, not by water but by fire.

Secondly, Peter points out that although it may seem that a long time has passed since Christ promised to return, it is only a long time from a mortal human perspective of time. Because God is immortal and eternal, He views time differently. Peter therefore says: “Be not ignorant of this one thing, that a thousand years to us is as one day to the Lord.” Putting it into modern terms, Peter is saying: “So what if a few thousand years goes by without Christ coming back; it’s only like a couple of days to the Lord.”

Peter then goes on to say that the length of time involved should not be regarded as an indication of slackness on God's part. It should rather be interpreted as an exhibition of longsuffering and merciful compassion, for the longer God waits, there is an increased opportunity for more people to qualify for salvation.

"But," says Peter, "the day of the lord will come as a thief, and then the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are in it shall be burned up. Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, think what sort of persons you ought to be in all holy conversation and godly conduct, looking eagerly for the coming of the day of God, in which the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat. Nevertheless we, according to his promise, wait for a new heavens and a new earth in which dwells righteousness. Therefore beloved, seeing that you wait for such things, be diligent that you may be found by him at peace, without spot and blameless."

LITERAL, PERSONAL, PHYSICAL AND VISIBLE

The doctrine of the second coming of Christ is basically a very simple and straight-forward concept, and it is clear from what the Bible says on the subject that it will be very literal, personal, physical and visible. This is particularly evident in Act. 1:9-12. These verses teach us that Jesus chose the Mount of Olives east of Jerusalem to be the place from which he wanted to ascend to heaven. As he ascended in full view of his apostles until a cloud removed him out of sight, an angel declared to them these words: "You men of Galilee, why stand here gazing into heaven? This same Jesus who is taken up from you into heaven, shall come in the same way as you have seen him go into heaven."

Because the Jesus who ascended to heaven was a physical, visible, bodily being, and could be seen ascending; and this same Jesus will come in the same way as he was seen going; we are forced to conclude that his return from heaven will be just as personal, physical and visible as his ascension to heaven. "Behold, he comes with clouds, and every eye shall see him" (Rev. 1:7).

Now, if Jesus ascended to heaven from the Mount of Olives, and is going to come back in the same way as he departed, it would not be surprising if the Mount of Olives, being the launching pad of his departure, will also be the touchdown pad of his return. According to Scripture, this in fact will be the case. Amazingly enough, 500 years

before Jesus was even born, the Spirit of God inspired the prophet Zechariah to proclaim these words concerning his second coming: “And his feet shall stand in that day upon the Mount of Olives, east of Jerusalem” (Zech. 14:14). This prophecy no doubt led Jesus to choose the Mount of Olives as the launching pad for his ascension to heaven.

The return of the first man put into space was a very dramatic event, but it will pale into insignificance compared to Christ’s return. The second coming will be the most world-shaking event in the whole of human history, unprecedented in magnitude. In view of this, it would not be an over-statement to say that the Mount of Olives is the most strategic spot on earth!

HUGE LAND CONVULSION

Now, according to Zech. 14:4, a mighty earthquake is going to occur as Jesus descends to the Mount of Olives, resulting in an enormous convulsion in the land of Israel. It will be the epi-centre of a world-wide convulsion. The prophecy says that it will cause the Mount of Olives to split in half. Half will move to the north and the other half to the south, creating a valley which will run from east to west.

Tremendous physical changes will occur in the land as a result. Verse 10 says that all the hill country around Jerusalem, up to 50kms southward and 10kms northward, will be levelled and turned into a plain. The site of Jerusalem however, will be heaved up by the earthquake to a height higher than any other place in the land, and possibly higher than any other mountain in the whole earth, due to the levelling effect that all mountains will suffer when the whole earth is shaken. The new elevated site of Jerusalem will, of course, be accentuated as a result of the surrounding hills and mountains being levelled.

Zech. 14:8 also refers to a subterranean river being opened up by the earthquake and flowing out from the new elevated site of Jerusalem. It flows in two directions: half goes into the Dead sea and the other half into the Mediterranean sea. Other prophecies mention this as well. One of them in Ezk. 47 says the Dead sea will be healed as a result of the inflow and will end up teeming with fish of all species like those in the Mediterranean.

Such prophecies as these make it clear that the return of Christ will be physical and visible and will have very physical and visible effects in the earth, particularly in the promised land.

WHEN?

So then, in relation to the question: Why is Christ coming back to the earth, we have seen that he is coming to attend to unfinished business. He will raise the dead and give eternal life to his faithful followers, and establish the kingdom of God upon the earth, resulting in righteousness and peace prevailing upon the whole planet.

In relation to how Jesus will come, we have seen that he is coming in the same manner as he went: through the air, physically and visibly.

In relation to where he is coming, we have seen that he is coming to earth, and his feet will touch down on a particular place in the earth, namely: the Mount of Olives, east of Jerusalem in the land of Israel.

This brings us to the question of when is he coming? We are told in Act. 17:31 that God has appointed a day, but Jesus taught that no man knows the day (Matt. 24:36). But we can be sure of one thing: although some will conclude that he is tarrying, i.e. delaying his return (Matt. 24:48) and others will scoff at the prospect of his second coming (2 Pet. 3), he will not tarry. When the appointed day on the divine calendar arrives, the last trumpet will sound and he will descend from heaven and the result will be, as we read in Rev. 11:15: “The kingdom of this world will become the kingdom of our Lord, and of His Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever.”

“For yet a little while, and he who will come shall come, and will not tarry” (Heb. 10:37).

SIGNS OF HIS COMING

Although no man knows the specific day of Christ’s coming, he predicted certain signs to indicate the era of his return. He did this in response to a question put to him by his apostles: “What shall be the sign of your coming and the end of the age?” (Matt. 24:3). The verses which follow, record a number of signs which can all be seen on the horizon today. He said there would be the continual threat of wars, famines and pestilences on an unprecedented scale, and earthquakes in many different places. He also said there would be many false prophets and teachers, and that there would ultimately be great tribulation such as has never happened since the beginning of history and will never happen again. He went on to say that unless there was divine intervention, no living thing would survive.

The prospect of the annihilation of all forms of life on planet earth

was never a threat until the nuclear age. But there are now enough nuclear weapons stockpiled to exterminate man. Unless Jesus returns, man will destroy himself.

Jesus also warned that prior to his return, conditions in the earth would be like they were in Noah's day and Lot's day (Matt. 24:36-39. Lk. 17:26-30). In Noah's day, the thoughts of men's hearts were evil continually; violence and crime filled the earth, and God's way (truth) was corrupted (Gen. 6:5, 11-12). In spite of Noah building the ark and warning the people of impending judgement, they mocked and scoffed and carried on with their carefree and indulgent life, eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, as if nothing was going to happen, right up to the day that Noah and his family boarded the boat and the door was shut.

Regarding Lot: He lived in Sodom where gross immorality was rife. Homosexuality was socially acceptable and men were perverted to the core in every way possible to the flesh, even to the point of wanting to sexually violate two dignified men who came to visit Lot. They happened to be angels who came to warn Lot to leave the city because it was going to be destroyed (Gen. 19). Lot warned his sons in law about the impending judgement of God, but they didn't believe him. They thought he was only mocking or jesting (Gen. 19:14). They and the inhabitants of Sodom continued on their merry way, eating and drinking, buying and selling, planting and building, right up to the day that Lot and his wife and two daughters evacuated the city and fire rained down from heaven and destroyed them all, along with their city and possessions.

So then, in view of the increase of wars and violence and crime in the earth today; the threat of unprecedented famines and pestilences due to over population; the threat of nuclear war and the extermination of all life on planet earth; the corruption of God's way and truth by many false teachers and prophets; the decline in moral values, seen particularly in the widespread acceptance in society of sex outside of marriage and homosexuality along with the increasing scoffing scepticism towards the return of Christ, accompanied by a grossly materialistic and godless attitude; it is clear that we are living in the era of the second coming of Christ - the era referred to by Paul when he said: "In the last days perilous times (i.e. difficult and trying times full of perils) shall come. For men will be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, inhuman ... lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God" (2 Tim. 3:1-5).

THE REVIVAL OF THE NATION OF ISRAEL

Jesus concluded his list of signs concerning his second coming, by giving a parable concerning a fig tree. He said: “When his branch becomes tender and puts forth leaves, you know that summer is near. So also, when you see all these things, know that he is near, even at the door. Truly I say to you, this generation will not pass away till all these things be fulfilled” (Matt. 24:32-34).

Because the fig tree is used in the Bible as a symbol for the nation of Israel, it is possible that Jesus had the revival of the nation in mind when he talked about the fig tree putting forth its leaves. If so, his statement: “When you see all these things,” which he made after mentioning the revival of the fig tree, could include the fig tree among the signs. Be that as it may, other prophecies certainly teach that the revival of the nation of Israel is a sign of Christ’s return e.g. Ezk. 37:21-22.

In order for the nation of Israel to revive, Jews obviously had to return from their world-wide dispersion to their land. Various prophecies in Scripture teach that they would do this in the last days, and they have been doing it in earnest since the holocaust. For the first time in nearly 2,000 years they have become a nation again displayed on the world map, and have become a force to be reckoned with in the middle east.

It is clearly taught in Ezk. 37:21-22 that God would gather the Jews from the nations where they were dispersed and bring them back to their own land and make them a nation in that land, prior to Messiah their king coming to reign over them. In this prophecy, the return of the Jews to their land and the revival of their nation, are presented as two major signs of the second coming. These signs have been fulfilled, indicating once again that we are living in the era of Christ’s return and the countdown period to Armageddon.

In addition to this there are prophecies which teach that as a prelude to Armageddon, the Moslem nations surrounding Israel would become anti-Israel and eventually attack her, seeking her downfall and destruction. Moslem nations today are certainly anti-Israel and some have openly stated their desire and ambition to destroy Israel. This also confirms that we are living in the era of the second coming of Christ.

THE TIME FACTOR

Finally, there is the time factor to consider i.e. although no man will know the day of Christ’s return, can we know the century or

millennium when that day occurs? Possibly! A hint of the answer to this question is given in Gibbon's reference to the doctrine of the millennium as believed by the early church in his book on the History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire. He says that the early Christians believed the millennium would be "a joyful Sabbath of a thousand years." This connection between the millennium and Sabbath is quite Scriptural, for in Heb. 4:9 the coming kingdom and reign of Christ is referred to as "a Sabbath rest." It is also referred to as a "rest" in Isa. 11:10, and the word "rest" here is the same word used elsewhere for the seventh day Sabbath rest.

Because the Sabbath was the seventh day, and one day to the Lord is as a thousand years to man, some have concluded that the seven day week instituted by God at the very beginning was prophetic of the history of man. This has led many to expect that the millennial reign of Christ will be the seventh millennium in man's history.

We are in that era now, for according to Bible chronology, it was around 2,000 years from Adam to Abraham, 2,000 years from Abraham to Christ, and 2,000 years from Christ to the year 2,000 A.D. The 21st century has ushered us into the seventh millennium! Significantly enough, this period coincides and synchronizes with the fulfilment of the signs given in Scripture of the second coming. This constitutes a double confirmation that we are living in the end time era.

We cannot of course, work out the precise day in the twenty first century when the seventh millennial rest of Christ will begin. The reason for this is because it will probably be dated from the fall of man when sin first entered the world resulting in many scourges, stresses and burdens, necessitating the "rest" and the Bible does not say how long it was after man was created that this happened.

NOT IN DARKNESS

In view of the signs of the times that we in the twenty first century are privileged to witness, the words penned by the apostle Paul to the Thessalonians are more relevant than ever: "But of the times and the seasons brethren, you have no need for me to write to you, for you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night. For when they shall say, peace and safety; then sudden destruction comes upon them, as birth pangs upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape. But you brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief. You are all the children of the light,

and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness” (1 Thes. 5:1-5).

In relation to the return of Christ, a pertinent question is asked in Mal. 3:2: “But who may abide (endure) the day of his coming? And who shall stand (survive) when he appears?” A later verse in Mal. 3:16 provides the answer: “Those who revere the Lord and speak often to one another (about the Lord). The lord listens and hearkens to them, and a book of remembrance is written in His presence concerning those who revere the Lord and who give thought and honour to His name. And they shall be mine, says the Lord of hosts; my special jewels on the day when I act; and I will spare them, as a man spares his son who serves him.”

The fact that Christ is coming to reward the righteous and punish the wicked should have a deep effect on the lives of those who believe it. It should be an incentive to holy living and a stimulus to watchfulness and faithfulness. As the apostle John puts it: “Every man who has this hope in Him purifies himself, even as he (Jesus) is pure” (1 Jn. 3:1-3). And if we purify ourselves and are truly sanctified servants, we can, like the apostle John, confidently and unhesitatingly reply: “Even so come Lord Jesus,” in response to his promise: “Surely I come quickly.”

A test can be made concerning ourselves and Christ’s return by honestly asking ourselves how willingly and readily we can make the same answer as John’s faith. Whatever it is in our life that makes us hesitate to say: “Even so come Lord Jesus,” is the thing that should not be in our life. Whatever ambition or goal, no matter how good and legitimate in its own right it might be; if it makes us want the Lord to delay or postpone his return to a later date, it is an impediment to full development of faith and needs to be made to take second place in our life and be subservient to Christ. All who profess Christ to be Lord of their life must come to the place where they fit into the category of those referred to in 2 Tim. 4:9 who “love his (Christ’s) appearing” and therefore look forward to it and do not regard it as an unwelcome intrusion. Those who “love his appearing” in v9 are contrasted with those in v10 who “love this present world” and who end up forsaking Jesus as a result.

