

Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

Christ's Coming to Reign*

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THE SECOND ADVENT

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The second coming of Christ to the earth is the theme of many passages in both Testaments, the more important passages being as follows: Deuteronomy 30:3; Psalm 2; Isaiah 63:1–6; Daniel 2:44–45; 7:13–14; Matthew 24–25; Mark 13; Luke 21; Acts 1:11; Romans 11:26; 1 Thessalonians 3:13; 5:1–4; 2 Thessalonians 1:7–2:12; 2 Peter 2:1–3:17; Jude 1:14–15; Revelation 1:7; 19:11–21.

The first reference to the second coming of Christ in the Scriptures is found in connection with the prediction of the regathering of Israel in Deuteronomy 30:1–5. The promise is given in connection with the invitation to Israel to repent and return to the Lord, which repentance is predicted as taking place just before the second coming of Christ in Zechariah 12:10–14. This theme is amplified in many other Scriptures and reveals that the second coming of Christ has the immediate object of delivering Israel from her persecutors and restoring to their land those who were dispersed.

In Daniel 2:44–45 and Daniel 7:13–14 it is revealed that the second coming of Christ will end the times of the Gentiles and bring in the millennial kingdom of Christ. Daniel 7:13–14 describes it in these words: “I saw in the night-visions, and, behold, there came with the clouds of heaven one like unto a son of man, and he came even to the ancient of days, and they brought him near before him. And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all the peoples, nations, and languages should serve him: his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed.” The coming of Christ as portrayed in Isaiah 63:1–6 reveals that there will be a terrible judgment upon unbelievers in the day of Christ’s return and that it will be a day of vengeance. This of course is confirmed by many later passages.

One of the most comprehensive passages in the New Testament is found in Matthew 24:27–30. Here, in answer to the question of the disciples concerning the signs of His coming and the end of the age, Christ reveals a comprehensive order of events which will precede and follow His second coming. In the early portion of Matthew 24 a general description of tribulation which characterizes the present age and especially the end of

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the age is described. There will be wars, famines, pestilences, and earthquakes as well as persecution of those who confess the Lord. There will be many false prophets and much iniquity, and the love of many professing Christians will grow cold. As the age comes to its end the gospel of the kingdom will be preached to all the world.

Matthew 24 also indicates the specific character of the period just preceding the second coming as fulfilling the time of great tribulation anticipated in the prediction of the time of Jacob's trouble (Jer. 30:7) and the great tribulation of Daniel 12:1. Christ predicts that this time of great tribulation will be a spectacular event which will result in immediate persecution of the people of Israel who are in Judea. They are accordingly exhorted to flee immediately (Matt. 24:15–20). This time is designated as the "great tribulation," unprecedented in its severity, which will end in the destruction of all flesh if it were not cut short by the second coming of Christ. During this period there will be many false reports of a secret coming of Christ and an abundance of false christs and false prophets (Matt. 24:21–26).

The second coming of Christ itself is described in graphic terms in Matthew 24:27–30, "For as the lightning cometh forth from the east, and is seen even unto the west; so shall be the coming of the Son of man. Wheresoever the carcass is, there will the eagles be gathered together. But immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun shall be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken: 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."

In demonstration of the fact that the second coming of Christ will not be a secret event, it is described as lightning spreading across the heavens from the east to the west as the glory of Christ becomes manifest to the entire world. It will occur after the tribulation and be just preceded by darkening of the sun and the moon, and by stars falling from heaven. The sign of the Son of man predicted in Matthew 24:30 is apparently the glory of the Lord which will appear in the heavens as Christ returns. It is predicted that all the earth will see this event and it may extend over an entire twenty-four hour period which in the earth's rotation would permit the entire earth to see it. According to Matthew, Christ will come back accompanied by clouds and with great power and glory.

According to Matthew 25:31–46 after the second coming to the earth Christ will establish His throne and then judge the nations, separating the sheep from the goats, that is, separating the saved from the unsaved. The sheep and the goats although saved by faith and by grace, as are the saints of all ages, are manifested in that time by their works which demonstrate their true character. The goats, representing the unsaved, are cast into everlasting fire. The sheep, the tribulation saints among the Gentiles who have survived

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the persecutions, will be ushered into the millennial kingdom. A similar judgment related to the second coming may be observed in Ezekiel 20:34–38 where the rebels, that is, unsaved Israelites, are purged out and believing Israel is ushered into their promised land. Passages parallel to Matthew 24–25 such as Mark 13 and Luke 21 confirm these major facts and add detail. The Gospel of John, while introducing the subject of the rapture of the church (14:1–3), does not deal at length with the subject of the second coming to the earth. It is probable, however, that the Acts 1:11 reference has to do with the second coming of Christ to the earth. According to this passage He will come to the earth as He went to heaven, that is gradually, bodily, visibly, and accompanied by clouds.

The second coming of Christ referred to in Romans 11:26 confirms the Old Testament predictions that Christ in His second coming will deliver Israel from her persecutors and bring great spiritual revival to His ancient people. In general the Pauline letters are more concerned with the rapture than they are with the second coming to the earth. Some have taken 1 Thessalonians 3:13 as a picture of Christ coming to the earth with His saints from heaven. Others have referred to it as the arrival in heaven in connection with the rapture because the coming is stated to be “before God” and related to the church.

The day of the Lord in 1 Thessalonians 5:1–4 has to do with the period immediately preceding Christ’s coming to the earth which is a time of tribulation, and speaks of the wrath of God which will be poured out in the great tribulation as well as the second coming of Christ itself. This time of judgment is in contrast to the prospect of the church for the coming of Christ for them when they will be caught up to be with the Lord as revealed in the preceding chapter.

Another important factor relative to the second advent is revealed in 2 Thessalonians 1:7–2:12. The fact that Christ will be revealed in glory in the heavens and will take vengeance on unbelievers is repeated as in other passages. Detail given concerning the period preceding the second coming reveals that it will be a time of apostasy, that in it the “lawless one” will be revealed who will oppose God and exalt himself to be god and as such will be worshipped in the temple of God. Revealed here is the fact that this evil character cannot take his place in the world until the restraint which now characterizes the present age be removed. Many have understood this to be a reference to the Holy Spirit in His restraining work which will be removed in large measure when the rapture of the church takes place. The wicked person of whom this passage speaks will support his work by satanic miracles which will deceive those who do not believe the truth. This will come to an end at the second coming of Christ when he will be destroyed as indicated in 2 Thessalonians 2:8 and confirmed by Revelation 19:20.

An extensive revelation is given in 2 Peter 2:1–3:17 relative to the apostasy which will characterize the present age which will have its culmination in the period preceding the

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Lord's return. The passage especially emphasizes, however, the destruction of the heavens and the earth which will follow the millennial kingdom (2 Pet. 3:10). 2 Peter in general describes the broad context of the second coming, that is, the events which precede and events which will ultimately follow, but it does not describe the second coming specifically.

Jude quotes Enoch as predicting the second coming of Christ (Jude 1:14–15). Here are gathered many of the elements found in preceding passages such as the fact that the Lord will be accompanied by myriads of His saints and at His second will execute judgment upon the wicked. In Jude as in 2 Peter the second coming of Christ is presented as a judgment of God upon apostasy.

The last book of the Bible, the book of Revelation, is in many respects the capstone on the doctrine of the second coming of Christ. This truth is introduced in the first chapter with the pronouncement, "Behold, he cometh with the clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they that pierced him; and all the tribes of the earth shall mourn over him. Even so, Amen" (Rev. 1:7). Most of the book of Revelation consists in exhortations and predictions in view of the Lord's return and unfolds in more detail than any other portion of Scripture the great tribulation which will precede the second advent.

The great tribulation is climaxed by the vision which John records in Revelation 19:11–21. In this, Christ is pictured as coming from heaven on a white horse accompanied by the armies of heaven to claim His right as King of kings and Lord of lords to judge the wicked earth. The resultant description gives in graphic detail the destruction of the armies which had been previously gathered in a final gigantic world war. All of these armies oppose Christ at His second coming. Not only the armies, but the world ruler and the false prophet are destroyed, and the beast and the false prophet are cast alive into the lake of fire.

This glorious event is the prelude to the establishment of the millennial kingdom of Christ. The early verses of chapter 20 of Revelation indicate that Satan will be bound and cast into the bottomless pit to remain inactive for the entire thousand years of Christ's reign on earth. The vision which John sees is given specific interpretation, namely, that Satan is so bound that he will not deceive the nations. He will remain bound for a thousand years and after this will be loosed. This interpretation makes impossible the spiritualization of this passage as many have done in an attempt to eliminate the millennial reign of Christ. In the verses which follow, the millennial kingdom is established.

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THE SECOND ADVENT IN RELATION TO THE PROGRAM OF GOD

The second advent is not only an important event, in itself of tremendous significance, but its relationships extend to every important undertaking of God related to the end time.

Relation to Israel. As previously indicated the second coming of Christ has a most important relation to Israel as a nation. At this coming of Christ, Israel is delivered from her enemies and persecutions which characterized the time of Jacob's trouble which just precede the second advent. It also is the time in which Israel is brought into the millennial reign, which is a time of deliverance, glory, and blessing for the nation Israel. This deliverance is indicated in many passages such as Joel. 2, Matthew 24–25, Romans 11:26, and Revelation 19:17–21. Zechariah 14:1–3 indicates that Jerusalem itself in the midst of military conflict will be rescued by the return of the Lord.

The second coming of Christ will also be the occasion for Israel's judgment. Those who survive the tribulation will be judged concerning their relationship to Christ and those who are worthy to enter the kingdom will be brought into the promised land while others will be purged out (Ezek. 20:34–38; Matt. 24:9–25:30). It is probable that the judgment of Israel raised from the dead will also take place at this time and Israel will be rewarded (Dan. 12:2–3).

Those Israelites living on earth who qualify for entrance into the kingdom are brought into the land promised to their fathers and fulfill extended passages of prophecy relating to the regathering, revival, and restoration of the nation Israel such as Isaiah 25:9–10; 27:12–13; 61:3–62:12; 65:18–66:24; Jeremiah 23:1–40; 31:1–40; 33:1–26; Ezekiel 33:21–37:28; 40:1–48:35; Daniel 2:44–45; 7:9–27; Zechariah 13:8–9; Romans 11:26; Revelation 20:4.

Relation of the second advent to Gentiles. As previously indicated the second coming marks the important transition from the times of the Gentiles to the millennial kingdom of Christ and ends the period beginning with the captivity of Israel in the seventh century b.c. As Daniel's prophecies indicate, four great world empires run their course culminating in the final world empire which will rule the world at the time of the great tribulation which constitutes the final portion of the fourth empire.

The second coming of Christ is the occasion for the judgment of the Gentiles, both nationally and individually (Ezek. 38:1–39:29; Dan. 2:44–45; Matt. 25:31–46; Rev. 19:15). This judgment is specifically directed to those Gentiles who are living at the second coming. Gentiles who have put their faith in Christ are ushered into the blessings of the millennial kingdom and all others are put to death.

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Relation of the second advent to the creation as a whole. When Christ returns to the earth there is also a dramatic change in creation as a whole. A curse which fell upon the physical world as a result of Adam's sin is now at least partially relieved and the natural world is restored to its fruitfulness and Edenic beauty which it had before the fall. (Isa. 11:6–8, Isa. 11:3–5; 65:18–25; Rom. 8:21–22). As a result of the removal of the curse the desert will be reclaimed, water will be found in the wilderness, and prosperity will characterize the earth. The fact that the earth is abundant in its fruitfulness contributes immeasurably to the prosperity and blessing which characterizes Christ's reign on the earth.

Relation of the second coming to Satan and sin. As plainly stated in Revelation 20:1–3 Satan is bound and rendered inoperative at the beginning of the millennial reign of Christ. It may be assumed that at the same time all demonic activity will cease. As Christ will be reigning with absolute authority over the world, no open wickedness will be permitted and any sin or rebellion against Christ will be immediately judged and put down. (Isa. 11:3–5). While human beings in their natural bodies on earth will still have a sin nature capable of falling short of the perfect will of God, there will be no stimulus of this by Satan or evil spirits, and whatever sin eventuates will be due solely to the evil heart of man. This situation makes possible a world in which all people at least outwardly profess to follow the Savior, and civilization as a whole attains an unusually high standard of morality and spirituality. Only at the end of the millennium when Satan is again loosed is there rebellion against Christ which results in judgment upon those who join hands with Satan (Rev. 20:7–10).

Relation of the second advent to the tribulation period. The second coming clearly marks the end of the tribulation. All millennial views agree that this is the case, although the postmillennial theory associates the coming of Christ with the closing period of trouble in the millennium rather than a period of tribulation before the millennium. At the second coming of Christ the tribulation comes to abrupt close and sin is judged.

Relation of the second advent to the rapture. As indicated in a previous discussion, the pretribulational concept of the rapture places the translation of the saints more than seven years before the second advent. While both are a "coming" of the Lord, at the rapture Christ comes only to the air to remove the saints from the earth and take them back to heaven, while at the second advent Christ comes to the earth, His feet touch the Mount of Olives (Zech. 14:4), and He assumes His proper role as King over the whole world (Zech. 14:9). As indicated in previous discussion, the rapture of the church and the second advent to the earth are different events distinguished by many important characteristics.

The second advent in relation to the millennium. As indicated plainly in Revelation 19–20 the millennium immediately follows the second advent according to the premillennial

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interpretation. The postmillennial view places the second advent after the millennium and the amillennial view denies that the millennium follows. If the many passages cited concerning the second coming and the kingdom on earth are understood in their normal meaning, it teaches unmistakably a kingdom on earth following the second advent, the duration of which is stated in Revelation 20 to be one thousand years. Just as the first coming of Christ was literal, personal, and bodily and was followed by the present age, so the second coming of Christ will be followed by the millennium kingdom. The analogy of this first coming as well as the description of His second coming demands a personal and literal return of Christ. The various judgments, His manifested glory, the resurrections related to the second advent and many other factors combine to require such an interpretation. Few events of the Scripture are given more accurate presentation and are more clearly described by preceding and succeeding events than the second coming of Christ. In view of this obvious act, it is unnecessary that any form of interpretation should be adopted which would explain away that which is so plainly taught in the prophetic Word.¹

¹ Walvoord, J. F. (1966). "Christ's Coming to Reign." *Bibliotheca Sacra*, 123, 195–203.