

What Will Happen With Christ Returns?

Perry Cotham

Perry Cotham was born to Christian parents January 5, 1912 in Murray, Kentucky. He was baptized at an early age and began preaching soon after in 1929 at the age of 17. He graduated from Freed-Hardeman College (then a junior college) 1931. He then entered college at his hometown of Murray, Kentucky and graduated from Murray State University in 1934. While attending college he preached for several of the area churches and conducted meetings. After several years of local work in Kentucky, Oklahoma and Texas he began full time meeting work in 1972. Since that time he has preached in all 50 of the United States and in all inhabited continents of the world, including over 70 nations. He has written 16 tracts and published 3 debate books with those of the Pentecostal persuasion. Perry lives in Grand Prairie, Texas.

Christ will come again. More than three hundred passages in the New Testament either mention or allude to that event. Unfortunately, however, there have been so many theories concerning His second coming (and so many controversies) that people have neglected to give this Scriptural theme proper attention.

Christ's second coming is unquestionably established as a *promise* of the Bible. At the ascension of Jesus, the angels said to the apostles as they looked up toward heaven: "Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven" (Acts 1:11).

Jesus himself said He would come again. Prior to His leaving the disciples, Christ said to them: "I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself" (John 14:2-3). The apostles declared that Christ would come again. Paul said: "For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven..." (1 Thessalonians 4:16). The writer of the Book of Hebrews said that He would "appear the second time" (9:28). John wrote: "...when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is" (1 John 3:2).

Even now, as in early days, some doubt the Lord's return. "...there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, and saying, Where is the promise of his coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation" (2 Peter 3:3-4).

Although, skeptics doubt and mockers scoff at the idea, Christians believe in His second appearance; for they believe the Bible. As far as the fulfillment of this promise is concerned, a thousand years is no more than one day with God (2 Peter 3:8). However, "The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come" (2 Peter 3:9-10). The world and the present state of things will come to an end. This earth will pass out of existence. "...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 therein shall be burned up" declared the apostle Peter (2 Peter 3:10). Jesus will return. Furthermore, Christ's second coming will be at the end of this world,

when time shall have run its course, in the last day of this last age of time. "Then cometh the end" (1 Corinthians 15:24).

His Coming Will Be Visible

The manner of Christ's coming is personal, visible, audible, glorious and sudden. When Jesus comes, "every eye shall see him," even the actual participants in the crucifixion of the Son of God: "Behold, he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him; and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him" (Revelation 1:7). Regardless of where they may be, all nations of the earth shall witness His return. Then every knee shall bow (Philippians 2:10-11).

Christ is coming "with clouds" (Acts 1:9; Revelation 1:7), "in flaming fire" (2 Thessalonians 1:8). "with his mighty angels" (2 Thessalonians 1:7; Matthew 16:27), "with ten thousands of his saints" (Jude 14), "with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and the trumpet of God" (1 Thessalonians 4:16). Undoubtedly, Christ's coming will not be hidden and concealed but open and manifest. The Lord's sudden and unexpected appearance will be an awesome spectacle to unbelievers, but it will be a wonderful day for the righteous.

The Time Is Unknown

The time of Christ's coming is hidden in the mind of God, one of the "secret things" which belongs only to God (Deuteronomy 29:29). Paul stated to the Athenians that God "hath appointed a day, in which he will judge the world in righteousness..." (Acts 17:31). But God has not revealed the date of any man.

Jesus said concerning that day and hour: "But of that day and that hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father" (Mark 13:32). His second coming may be at midnight or early morning; at any moment He may appear; it could be today. Man does not know when; but he does know that when Jesus comes, business will be going on as usual, even as it was before the flood, and that many will be unprepared (Matthew 24:37-39; cf. Matthew 25:13).

Christ's coming will be sudden and without warning. He will come unexpectedly and unannounced, even as "a thief in the night" (2 Peter 3:10; 1 Thessalonians 5:2). Hence, the solemn warning: "Therefore, be ye ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh" (Matthew 24:44; cf. Mark 13:35-37).

Date Setters Are Deceiving

Since no one knows the time of Christ's coming, it is ridiculous for people to set dates for His return. Yet, this has been done, it is still being done, and honest people are being deceived by the "date-setters." For example, William Miller, the founder of the Adventist movement, predicted that Christ would come in October 1843. He converted many people to his belief. The date came, but Jesus did not come. Although disappointed, Miller would not be out-done, so he told his followers he had

missed his calculations in prophecy one year, and that the Lord would come the next year at that time. Again, the date came, but Christ did not come in 1844.

Later, Charles T. Russell, the founder of the religious group now known as “Jehovah’s Witnesses,” wrote about Christ’s return. He said the Lord came in October 1874, but only certain ones (his followers) were aware of it – that to all others He was invisible. But as already stated, when Jesus does come “every eye shall see Him” (Revelation 1:7); His coming will be visible, not only to the righteous but also to the wicked.

Following Russell’s death in 1916, J. F. Rutherford became the leader of the movement. He also made predictions. In 1920, Rutherford published a small book entitled *Millions Now Living Will Never Die*, in which he predicted that in 1925 the righteous dead would be raised and that all the old people then living who accepted the Ransomer would return to the days of their youth and “live on the earth forever and never see death.” He further predicted that Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and David, along with other Old Testament worthies, would be living on earth and visible after 1925. Indeed, 1925 would be the beginning of the “Golden Age.” All of that sounded good to many people before 1925, but 1925 came and Mr. Rutherford’s predictions failed. He even himself died after 1925. He was one of the ‘millions’ living when 1925 came, but he died. He, too, was a false prophet. So, the “date-setters” continue to deceive those who are ignorant of God’s Word and they continue to make money off of their false predictions. We are seemingly living in an age of riches without religion and money without morals. The recent Persian Gulf war and the more recent war in Iraq have caused many to talk about “the second Coming,” “the Rapture,” “the Battle of Armageddon,” and “the Millennium.” The Bible needs to be seriously studied.

In the long ago, Moses, speaking of false prophets clearly stated: “When a prophet speaketh in the name of the Lord, if the thing follow not, nor come to pass, that is the thing which the Lord hath not spoken, but the prophet hath spoken it presumptuously” (Deuteronomy 18:22). Some do not set any particular day for the Saviour’s return but stress that His coming is *imminent*, that it will be during “this year,” or “this generation.” Although this is certainly possible, the Bible does not teach it. The Scriptures did not teach in the first century that Christ’s return was very near (cf. 2 Thessalonians 2:1-3), and they do not teach that the Lord’s second coming is imminent now.

Perhaps now, as never before in history, men are thinking of the end of the world. While some people have been influenced by the sensational type of preaching and writing, others, perchance, have become indifferent, due to false prophets, to any Biblical teaching of Christ’s return and what will happen when Jesus comes again. Although the time is uncertain, the event of Christ’s coming itself is certain. It is not a myth. Christ will come again!

Events of Christ’s Second Coming

The events associated with Christ’s second coming are likewise plainly set forth in the Scriptures. They are: *First*, the end of the world when the earth shall be burned up and the works that are therein. Peter wrote: “But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in which 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 therein shall be burned up" (2 Peter 3:10). The earth will be annihilated when the Lord returns.

Second, there will be the simultaneous resurrection of all mankind, both the good and the bad. Christ stated: "Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation" (John 5:28-29). Paul wrote:

For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. But every man in his own order: Christ the first fruits; afterward they are Christ's at his coming. ... We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory (1 Corinthians 15:22-24, 51-54).

God, by His divine power, can accomplish this immediately!

Paul also wrote in another letter to Christians: "For our citizenship is in heaven; whence also we wait for a Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ: who shall fashion anew the body of our humiliation, that it may be conformed to the body of this glory, according to the working whereby he is able even to subject all things unto himself" (Philippians 3:20-21, ASV; cf. 1 John 3:2).

Third, it will be the final judgment for all men, those who are just and those who are unjust. Our Lord stated: "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: before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats" (Matthew 25:31-32). "And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment" (Hebrews 9:27). Christ will be the judge at the last day (John 5:27). The eternal Word of God will judge all the people (John 12:48).

The apostle Paul declared that Jesus Christ "shall judge the living and the dead" (2 Timothy 4:1, ASV), and to the Athenians he said that God "hath appointed a day, in which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead: (Acts 17:31). Definitely, judgment day is coming for all mankind: "we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. ... everyone of us shall give account of himself to God" (Romans 14:10, 12; cf. 2 Corinthians 5:10). Solomon, after stating that man's whole duty was to "fear God and keep his commandments," said: "For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil" (Ecclesiastes 12:13-14). And John wrote of the final judgment in these words: "And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it. ... And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works" (Revelation 20:11-12).

The Scriptures, therefore, clearly connect the end of the world, the general resurrection, and the final judgment with Christ's second coming. Though man is uninformed of the hour of the Lord's return, he is assured that His coming will be to raise the dead, both good and bad, and to judge all mankind and assign to each one his eternal destiny. The judgment will be "the righteous judgment of God" (Romans 2:5; 2 Thessalonians 1:5). This will include both those whom He has raised and those who are alive at His coming (1 Thessalonians 4:17). What a great event! This is one meeting we will all attend.

Christ is not going to set up an earthly material kingdom and reign over the whole world for 1000 years when He comes. The Bible teaches that Christ is now King (1 Timothy 6:15). His kingdom on earth is His church (Matthew 16:18-19), and it "is not of this world" (John 18:36). The early Christians had already entered the kingdom (Colossians 1:13-14; Hebrews 12:28; Revelation 1:9). When Christ comes again, He will cease His reign and return the kingdom back to God the Father (1 Corinthians 15:24-26; cf. Acts 2:34-35; Psalm 110:1), and eternity will commence.

Hence, in the language of Jesus, recorded in Matthew 25:31-46, there is declared (1) the time of the judgment – at the second coming of Christ, (2) the judge – Jesus Christ, (3) the subjects – all nations, and (4) the sentences passed – enter into eternal life, or enter into everlasting punishment. As surely as the righteous are to be rewarded, so also the wicked are to be punished. The saddest separation is when one is turned away into everlasting punishment. Families will then be divided, never to meet again.

Prepare For The Lord's Return

To conclude our study, we should plead with all to prepare now for the Lord's return and the judgment. Many will be unprepared when that time comes. In Christ's parable of the ten Virgins, "Five of them were wise, and five were foolish" (Matthew 25:2). The five wise virgins were prepared for their meeting of the bridegroom, whereas the five foolish virgins were unprepared. At the judgment there will be only two groups: the prepared and the unprepared. There will not be a third group; some too bad to go to heaven and too good to go to hell (cf. Matthew 7:13-14). Too, when the judgment takes place, no one will be able to borrow fitness (preparedness) from others, because preparation time is over. When death comes, it is too late to prepare for the Lord's return and the judgment. (cf. Luke 16:19-31). The five virgins who failed to make preparation are called "foolish" three times (Matthew 25:2,3,8).

God does not desire "that any should perish;" He wants all to "come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9). He, by His grace, has made it possible for every man to have his sins forgiven through the shed blood of Christ (Ephesians 2:8-10; Mark 16:15-16; Acts 2:37-38; 22:16).

However, there is danger if we delay in obeying the gospel (cf. 2 Thessalonians 1:7-9). When Paul preached before Felix and Drusilla, "he reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and the judgment to come." The sermon was so powerful that the governor "trembled"; yet he did not obey. He said: "Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee" (Acts 24:25). But he never obeyed the Lord, so far as it is known, but died as he had lived. That "convenient season" never came. Only by accepting Christ and obeying His will and then by being a faithful Christian is one

prepared always for Christ's return. Those unprepared should prepare *now* to meet Christ in judgment.

In the words we often sing, written by J. H. Stanley, we say:

Careless soul, why will you linger,
Wand'ring from the fold of God?
Hear ye not the invitation?
O, prepare to meet thy God.
Careless soul, O, heed the warning,
For your life will soon be gone;
O how sad to face the judgment,
Unprepared to meet thy God.

For anyone to say, "Tomorrow," when God says, "Today," may mean farewell to God and a soul lost in hell. No one is sure of tomorrow (Proverbs 27:1). Now may be the last opportunity, for death may be very near – even today. So, "behold, now is the day of salvation" (2 Corinthians 6:2). Obey the Lord now and be prepared for death and the judgment. To be almost saved is to be totally lost.

Works Cited

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See, for example, Hal Lindsey's recent book, "*The Late Great Planet Earth.*" (Grand Rapids, MI, Zondervan Publishing Company, 1970).