

Studies in The Second Coming of Jesus Christ

Taken from sermons preached
By Pastor W.E. Best



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Second Coming of Christ Chart

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The Coming of Christ The King (Matthew 24:3)

Preached by W.E. Best January 13, 2002

No subject has caused more controversy among students of eschatology than the future coming of the King. It may not appear to be of great importance to most professing Christians, but diligent students of Scripture will find it to be one that boggles their minds. Therefore, zealous Christians must learn that the subject involves Israel, the times of the Gentiles, the first advent of Jesus Christ, His death for the chosen Jews and Gentiles, the assembly Christ is building, the rapture of the assembly, the great tribulation, the kingdom established by Christ at His second advent, and eternity.

The sign of Christ's coming to consummate the present age was of the greatest interest to the disciples in the Olivet discourse: "And as He was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Him privately, saying, Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?" (Matt. 24:3 NASB). True eschatology is concerned with the expectation of Jesus Christ. That is the reason Matthew 23 concludes with, "BLESSED IS HE WHO COMES IN THE NAME OF THE LORD!" (NASB). The coming of the Lord is celebrated with praise. The double negative *ou me* in Matthew 23:39 is misinterpreted by most translations. The double negative gives stronger emphasis to the negative: "For I am saying to you, you may by no means [*ou me*] see Me from now until [predictive time word] you say, Blessed is the One coming in the name of the Lord" (Matt. 23:39—translation). There is not only a negative but also a positive side to this verse. The positive side means Israel will experience the blessing of restoration at Christ's second advent and then will permanently praise the King of kings and Lord of lords. (See Rom. 11; Rev. 7.) The eternal covenant of grace guarantees the fulfillment of this prediction (Rom. 11:1, 2; Heb. 13:20, 21).

The meaning of the Greek word *parousia* is of utmost importance in the study of the Olivet discourse. Three things should be considered: (1) What is the meaning of *parousia*? (2) How is the word used in the New Testament? (3) How do Biblical scholars interpret the word?

The meaning of the noun *parousia* in the NASB translation in II Corinthians 10:10 and Philipians 2:12 is presence. In all the other 22 references it is translated coming. It denotes both an "arrival" and a "consequent (following as an effect or result) presence with"—the arrival of the one coming. The English word "coming" does not fully express the meaning of the coming of the Lord as well as the Greek word *parousia*. Matthew used the word *parousia* four times in the Olivet discourse. Mark and Luke used the verb *erchomai*.

The *parousia* of Matthew 24 has in view the coming of the Son of Man to deal with conditions on earth. Judgment and carnage are related to the *parousia* of the Son of Man. The first advent of the Son of Man was "to serve, and to give His

life a ransom for many” (Matt. 20:28 NASB). He “did not come to judge the world, but to save the world” (John 12:47 NASB). However, at the parousia of the Son of Man of Matthew 24:27, He will come to judge because all judgment is committed to Him (John 5:22). To Israel, Christ is the Son of Man because He is the Son of David and the seed of Abraham (Rom. 1:3, 4; Gal. 3:16).

There are three major classifications where the noun parousia is used: (1) The references where the noun is applied to the title “Son of Man” are restricted to the Olivet discourse written by Matthew. Since the Olivet discourse concerns Israel, the title “Son of Man” is significant. The Son of Man is coming to deal with conditions on earth that are related to Israel. This coming will be not only an arrival, but also the Son of Man’s presence in judgment. (2) The titles “Christ,” “Lord Jesus,” and “Lord” are applied to the assembly or to saints in general (I Cor. 15:23; I Thess. 2:19; 3:13; 4:15; 5:23; II Thess. 2:1; James 5:7, 8; I John 2:28). (3) The titles “Lord Jesus Christ” and “day of God” are applied to judgment and the establishment of the kingdom (II Pet. 1:16; 3:12).

Many believe there is no secret parousia for the saints and that Christ will not come to them as a thief (I Thess. 5:4). They say believers should be ready for it whenever it comes, and they should be able to interpret the signs of its approach. They accuse those who believe in a secret rapture of surrendering their belief in the rapture at the any-moment principle by attempting to prove by signs that the signless and any-moment rapture must be near at hand.

Many historicists interpret the parousia of Christ in judgment on the Jewish nation as ending one age and bringing another into existence. They say the disciples were not asking about two different events that would be separated by two thousand years or more. To them, the “sign of His coming” (Matt. 24:3) was the same as the “sign when these things are about to take place” of Luke 21:7. Furthermore, they say the disciples were referring to their age, which came to an end in 70 A.D., and not to the “church” age of today. The disciples remembered that Christ said He would come in their lifetime (Matt. 16:28). Hence, to them, the new age is the spiritual Messianic Kingdom.

In contrast to the historicist belief, the Jewish age is not the “church” (assembly) age. Therefore, the time of the great tribulation can never be the assembly age. Furthermore, the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. is not the final judgment on Israel. Hence, the parousia cannot be restricted to 70 A.D. The rule of the Gentiles will terminate with Christ’s coming in power and great glory.

Amillennialists interpret the word parousia as not teaching a period of time between two stages of Christ’s coming—a coming for and a coming with the saints. They not only deny a literal coming of Christ to establish a kingdom on the earth, but they also affirm the parousia is the end of the world (II Pet. 3:7-10), the end of time (I Pet. 4:7; I Cor. 1: 7, 8), the resurrection of the dead (John 6:40), the final judgment (Matt. 25:31; John 12:48; II Thess. 1:5-10), the

church/kingdom delivered unto the Father (Luke 22:29; I Cor. 15:20-28), and then heaven (Phil. 3:20; I Pet. 1:4; II Pet. 3:13). Concerning the Olivet discourse, amillennialists believe the parousia of Christ as the Son of Man was to destroy Jerusalem, thus ending the old economy and ushering in the new. They also say the Olivet discourse has figures and symbols of Divine acts that effect great changes in the world, but they are not to be taken literally.

Realized millennialists differ from amillennialists. They feel amillennialists have been too negative; whereas, realized millennialists are positive. They affirm that the task of amillennialists is not to explain away the millennium but to explain it. Since it is a non-utopian type of millennium, they say one must make a distinction between realized fulfilled eschatological prophecy and unrealized unfulfilled eschatological prophecy. Realized millennialists believe the perfect age will follow the present non-utopian millennium. They claim that Satan's temporary restraint in the realized millennium will give way to his destruction by the brightness of Christ's presence.

The realized millennial view would make the millennium a present reality instead of a future hope. However, hope is based on the past because its foundation is in God's eternal covenant of grace. It is confirmed in the Person and work of Jesus Christ at His first advent. The final confirmation and realization of hope looks by faith to Christ's second advent and His kingdom (II Tim. 4:1). Hope is entertained and expressed in the absence of the Redeemer. That is the reason Paul said, "For in hope we have been saved, but hope that is seen is not hope; for why does one also hope for what he sees?" (Rom. 8:24 NASB).

Post-tribulation rapture premillennialists believe there is no evidence that the Greek noun parousia points to a pre-tribulation rapture. Their opinion is that there are only two events in Matthew 24, which are the destruction of Jerusalem and the parousia of the Son of Man who will consummate the age. They also exclude any two-phase coming, one for the saints and the other with the saints; therefore, they eliminate any idea of a secret rapture. They go so far as to think parousia is improperly translated. They think the word means to be bodily present, to be alongside of, or to arrive back to a designated place (II Cor. 10:10; Phil. 2:12). They also affirm the proper translation in Matthew 24:27, 37, and 39 is presence. They use I Corinthians 15:23-25 and Revelation 20:12 to teach (1) Christ's resurrection is the first fruits, (2) those who are Christ's at His coming, and (3) then comes the end—the rest of the dead. They adamantly affirm there is no evidence that parousia points to a pre-tribulation rapture.

Contrary to these variant views, an examination of the word parousia evidences a special significance when speaking of the second coming of Jesus Christ. This event is the hope of Christians: "For who is our hope or joy or crown of exultation? Is it not even you, in the presence [emprosthen, which means before or in the presence of] of our Lord Jesus at His coming? For you are our glory and joy" (I Thess. 2:19, 20 NASB). The noun parousia is translated "coming." This

verse points to a particular mode (manner of existence) of the presence of Christ. Christians acknowledge Christ's presence now (Matt. 28:20; Heb. 13:5), but there is a difference between Christ's spiritual presence—presence by His Spirit—and His physical presence (I John 3:2; Rev. 1:7).

Invisible presence by the Spirit and visible presence differ in the parousia (presence, coming, or advent) of Christ. Although Christians believe and know Christ, there is a condition of seeing and not seeing: “and though you have not seen Him, you love Him, and though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him, you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory” (I Pet. 1:8 NASB). With reference to Christ's ascension, “they also said, Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven” (Acts 1:11 NASB). Paul spoke of seeing Christ during the same dispensation of His personal absence: (1) “...But, now we do not yet see all things subjected to Him” (Heb. 2:8 NASB), (2) “...knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord” (II Cor. 5:6 NASB), and (3) “we are of good courage, I say, and prefer rather to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord” (II Cor. 5:8 NASB).

Presence and absence are mutually exclusive terms in human existence. However, in the Christian's relationship with Jesus Christ, the analogy breaks down. The mode of His presence in the parousia is the Christian's hope.

Two Aspects of Christ's Coming

(Matthew 24:15-41)

Preached by W.E. Best January 20, 2002

The Olivet discourse does not mention the secret rapture of the living members of Christ's assembly. Therefore, many students of eschatology think the absence of this teaching gives support to their refusal and condemnation of the rapture. Instead of lending support, it is a testimony against those who deny the secret rapture. Those who misuse Matthew 24:40-41 to teach the rapture fail to see that the one taken will be taken in judgment, and the one left will enter the kingdom that Christ will come to establish (II Tim. 4:1). According to the context of Matthew 24, the reference is to saved Jews—a remnant according to God's gracious choice (Rom. 11:5; Rev. 7:4-8)—and a great multitude from every nation (Rev. 7:9) who will enter the kingdom. Those who oppose the secret rapture fail to make the proper distinction between Israel and the assembly Christ is building. People who ignore any Scripture will soon manifest internally and externally who and what they are.

The two aspects of Christ's second advent—His coming for the assembly and His coming with the assembly—are dependent on the Biblical distinction between Israel and the assembly. The context of the Olivet discourse proves that the predictions apply to Israel and not the assembly (Matt. 23:36-25:46). There is no reference to the assembly in this important passage concerning Israel. One of the classic passages in the New Testament to prove this is Romans 9-11. Israel's past is portrayed in chapter 9, setting forth God's sovereignty. Israel's present is presented in chapter 10, setting forth God's righteousness. God's faithfulness to His promise to Israel is declared in chapter 11.

Neither resurrection nor rapture is connected with Noah: "For the coming of the Son of Man will be just like the days of Noah. For as in those days which were before the flood they were eating and drinking, they were marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and they did not understand until the flood came and took them away; so shall the coming [parousia] of the Son of Man be. Then there shall be two men in the field; one will be taken, and one will be left. Two women will be grinding at the mill; one will be taken, and one will be left" (Matt. 24:37-41 NASB). Noah and his family were preserved in the ark through the flood. All the rest of the human family perished in judgment.

Enoch who was translated before the judgment of God came on the earth best describes the rapture: "Then Enoch walked with God three hundred years after he became the father of Methuselah, and he had other sons and daughters. So all the days of Enoch were three hundred and sixty-five years. And Enoch walked with God; and he was not, for God took him" (Gen. 5:22-24 NASB). Walking with God is an enriching experience. Before the fall, God walked with man (Gen. 3:8). Subsequent to the fall, man walked with God. Three statements are made about Enoch in the Scriptures: (1) He walked with God (Gen. 5:22). (2) He prophesied for God (Jude 14). (3) He was pleasing to God (Heb. 11:5).

Enoch fathered Methuselah, whose name became a prophetic warning. Methuselah's name means it [the flood] will be sent when he is dead, and so it came to pass. Shortly after Methuselah's death the flood destroyed the ungodly. (Read Gen. 5-8.)

The case of Enoch and the flood favors the pre-tribulation rapture: "By faith Enoch was taken up so that he should not see death; AND HE WAS NOT FOUND BECAUSE GOD TOOK HIM UP; for he obtained the witness that before his being taken up he was pleasing to God" (Heb. 11:5 NASB). The Greek verb *metatithemi* is a compound verb, which means to remove. It means to transport (Acts 7:16) or translate out of the world (Heb. 11:5). In Hebrews 11:5, this verb is used two times: "was taken up [aorist passive indicative]" and "being taken up [aorist active indicative]."

The last reference to Enoch is Jude 14—"And about these also Enoch, in the seventh generation from Adam prophesied, saying, Behold, the Lord came with many thousands of His holy ones, to execute judgment upon all, and to convict all the ungodly of all their ungodly deeds which they have done in an ungodly way, and of all the harsh things which ungodly sinners have spoken against Him" (Jude 14, 15 NASB). The truth that Enoch possessed the spirit of prophecy is evident. That gift is revealed by the name he gave his son, Methuselah. Jesus Christ is ordained the Judge of the living and the dead. As Enoch warned the wicked before the flood, Jude warns the apostates before the supreme Judge judges them.

The common view that the resurrection will be a public affair is untenable in the light of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Christ is the firstfruits of the resurrection (I Cor. 15:23). Since the Head of the saints was resurrected in strict privacy, the members of Christ's body (the saints) will be raised in like manner. No mortal eye of unbelief will behold the resurrection of the just. Who witnessed the translation of Enoch (Heb. 11:5, 6)? Who witnessed Elijah's ascension to heaven by a whirlwind (II Kings 2)? Who will witness the resurrection of the just (I Thess. 4:17)?

The coming of Christ is not to be regarded as simply one act. Like His first advent, it will embrace a series of acts. Christ's first advent covered thirty-three years. He fulfilled numerous acts during that period of time. The major things connected with His first coming were His virgin birth, baptism, trial in the wilderness, public ministry to the Jews, turning from the Jews to the Gentiles, betrayal, death, resurrection, and ascension. Christ's leaving the world and going back to the Father cannot be regarded as one single act. It included His death, resurrection, and ascension. The second coming of Christ cannot mean one single act without a violation of order, which will include a number of events resultant of His advent. Hence, He will come for His own and then with His own at which time He will judge the wicked and establish the kingdom. Furthermore,

there will not be a simultaneous resurrection of all the dead when Christ comes for His own, but every man will be raised in his own order (I Cor. 15:23, 24).

Both the “morning star” (Rev. 22:16) and the “sun of righteousness” (Mal. 4:2) refer to Christ. As the morning star, few will see Christ. However, as the Son of righteousness, all will see Him. The day of the Lord Jesus is preceded by a morning, which begins in the night. This represents Christ’s coming when it is yet night. However, as the morning star, He will usher in the morning of the glorious day. This shows that dispensations may overlap to some extent, but that is common in Scripture. John the Baptist who was an Old Testament prophet and a New Testament preacher is an example. He stood as the connecting link between the two Testaments. As there are two major stages to Christ’s departure from the earth—Calvary and Olivet, there will be two stages to His second advent—in the air and to the earth.

Both distinct parts of Christ’s second advent are clearly revealed:

1. The coming of Christ **for** His own will be—
 - (1) In the air (I Thess. 4:17),
 - (2) As He went away (Acts 1:11),
 - (3) To take His own to heaven (John 14:2, 3),
 - (4) Before the day of wrath (I Thess. 1:10; 5:9),
 - (5) Before the Antichrist and the kingdom (II Thess. 2:1-3; Matt. 25:34),
 - (6) A comfort to the saints (I Thess. 4:18),
 - (7) The fulfillment of the saints’ hope (Titus 2:13).

2. The coming of Jesus Christ **with** His own will be—
 - (1) To the earth (Acts 1:11; Rev. 5:10),
 - (2) After God’s wrath is poured out on the earth (Rev. 19:14),
 - (3) To be admired in all the saints before the world (II Thess. 1:10),
 - (4) After the defeat of the Antichrist (II Thess. 2:8),
 - (5) To judge the world (I Cor. 6:2),
 - (6) To experience the wedding feast (Rev. 19:7-10),
 - (7) To reign with Christ in the kingdom (Rev. 5:10).

First Stage of Christ's Second Advent--Part 1

(John 14:1-4)

W.E. Best

The secret rapture of the saints, which is the first stage of Christ's second advent, is one of the major subjects of debate among students of eschatology. Those who believe the rapture will be visible are divided into such groups as amillennialists, realized millennialists, and postmillennialists. Persons who believe the rapture will be secret are premillennialists, but they are divided into pretribulation, midtribulation, and posttribulation rapturists.

Strong accusations are made against those who believe the Bible teaches a secret rapture of the saints before the tribulation. The following statements have been made by opponents to the secret aspect of Christ's second advent:

1. They say premillennialism signifies many resurrections.
2. They say grace is the first resurrection, and glory is the second.
3. They say there are not two comings included in the second advent.
4. They say pretribulation rapturism opposes Christ's high priestly prayer, "I do not ask Thee to take them out of the world, but to keep them from the evil one" (John 17:15 NASB).
5. They say none of the three Greek words *parousia*, *apokaluphis*, or *epiphaneia* will allow a secret, invisible, and quiet presence.
6. They say there is only an arrival, and it is held forth as the hope of the Christian and as a warning to all.
7. They say secret rapturism of the church is heresy.
8. They say that in Matthew 24 Christ not only refutes the concept of a secret rapture in verse 26 but He also warns that many deceivers will appear just prior to His return (Matt. 24:4, 5).
9. They say that those who meet the Lord in the air meet Him on His way to judgment.
10. They say the coming, appearing, and revelation of Christ are only different aspects of the one event.

Since there is no reference to either the rapture or the resurrection in the Olivet discourse, these truths must be searched elsewhere in Scripture. The age discussed in the Olivet discourse is the consummation of "the times of the Gentiles" (Luke 21:24), not the "end of the age" (Matt. 24:3). Furthermore, there is no reference to the assembly Christ is building, which is recorded in Matthew 16:18-19. The Olivet discourse in Matthew 24 is a message concerning Israel under Gentile dominion until its conclusion. The kingdom of Jesus Christ will succeed the conclusion of the Gentile age.

Jesus Christ did not leave the disciples in ignorance concerning the rapture of the saints. However, the Olivet discourse was not the place to discuss a subject that was not related to the persons involved. After giving His discourse, the

Savior left the Mount of Olives two days before Calvary and met with His disciples in the Passover discourse on the night before His crucifixion. On that occasion, Christ instructed His disciples concerning the first stage of His second advent (John 14:1-4).

The disciples had problems with not only Christ's death and resurrection (Matt. 16:21-23) but also the prediction He made concerning the Jews (Matt. 23:37-39). As soon as the assembly was announced, Christ proclaimed the foundation upon which it would be erected. The Savior openly predicted His sufferings and death only toward the close of His ministry (Matt. 16:21; 20:17-19; John 12:32, 33). The disciples were occupied with the idea of the restoration of the kingdom to Israel. Therefore, they wondered how the Lord Jesus could restore the kingdom to Israel if He died. Christ explained this to the disciples by giving Peter, James, and John a glorious experience on the Mount of Transfiguration (Matt. 16:17-17:13). Even in that experience, Peter wanted to erect three tabernacles and remain on the Mount. Peter, like all Christians, was a slow learner. He was overlooking the truth that there can be no kingdom apart from Christ's suffering and death.

Our Lord's going away was in two stages. Calvary was the first and Olivet the second (John 19:30; Acts 1:11). The high priest of old was privileged to pass into the holy of holies once a year because he carried in his hand the blood of the sacrifice (Lev. 16). The eternal Son of God who became the Kinsman Redeemer fulfilled this type. He passed into the presence of God the Father when once in the end of the age He put away the sins of the chosen ones by His poured out life (Heb. 10:1-25). Had He not ascended to the Father there would have been no preparation for the elect.

Having given the Olivet discourse, the Lord Jesus would not go to the cross without explaining to His disciples that they need not any longer be troubled because He would explain to them what they could expect. The first stage of Christ's second advent is taught in John 14:1-4—"LET not your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for 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 to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also. And you know the way where I am going" (NASB). This is one of the most familiar but misunderstood passages of Scripture. It has received extravagant interpretations.

Christ comforted His disciples subsequent to His statement, "Where I go, you cannot follow Me now; but you shall follow later" (John 13:36 NASB). His comfort began with the words, "LET not your heart be troubled..." (John 14:1 NASB). The thought expressed is "let not your heart any longer be troubled." When the truth of God is embraced, the people of God should not be troubled in heart. The Greek word for "troubled" is a present passive imperative of the verb *parasso*, which means to agitate, trouble, disturb, upset, or terrify. The verb is used 17

times, seven of which are in the Gospel of John (5:4, 7; 11:33; 12:27; 13:21; 14:1, 27).

Every person knows what trouble means. Therefore, the one who attempts to construct a theory of life and leaves trouble out of the account is no true philosopher. Job said, “MAN, who is born of woman, Is short-lived and full of turmoil [trouble—KJV]” (Job 14:1 NASB). No stage of one’s life from infancy to the grave is exempt from trouble. There are very few intervals of solid repose and tranquility of mind. Even the best of saints scarcely have time to dress their souls before they must put off their bodies in death. They spend too much time grasping at the shadow and failing to appropriate the substance. The Christian’s greatest problem is how to deal with trouble, not how to ignore it. A troubled heart will help no one in or out of difficulties.

Scripture states that Christ was troubled (John 11:33; 12:27; 13:21), but trouble to Christ does not mean what it does to men. Men’s troubles are caused by their sins that dishonor God, but Christ’s troubles were for the wrath due the elect for their sins. Clean water in a clean vessel does not become muddy when it is stirred by trouble. Conversely, clean water in an unclean vessel becomes muddy when stirred by trouble. Christ’s troubled soul or spirit did not dishonor God the Father. However, troubled Christians dishonor God because they are open to or under suspicion of unfaithfulness to Christ’s unchangeable love. This is the reason Christ said, “LET not your heart be troubled....” He then added, “...believe in God, believe also in Me” (John 14:1 NASB).

Christ gave the antidote to His disciples for not letting their hearts any longer be troubled: “...believe in God, believe also in Me.” There is a negative command in the first part of John 14:1—“LET not your heart be troubled.” The negative command is followed by two direct commands in the latter part of the verse—“believe in God, believe also in Me.” The first is called a prohibitive imperative, and the last two are called entreative imperatives. Both uses of the verb “believe” have the same inflected form—pisteuete. This means they can be either present active indicative or present active imperative. There is strong evidence that both are imperatives. That would make them harmonize with the negative command in the first part of the verse, which is also imperative.

The disciples had many things to trouble them. They were disturbed over their Master being troubled (John 11:33; 12:27; 13:21), Judas’ betrayal of the Savior (John 13:2), Christ’s predicted suffering and death (Matt. 16:21), the predicted destruction of Jerusalem (Matt. 23:38), and their Lord’s predicted coming again (Matt. 23:39). The disciples did not know how to cope with these trials. Therefore, Christ issued negative and positive commands. The antidote for the negative is twofold: (1) One must believe God’s prophetic word and submit to the Sovereign’s will. (2) One must believe in Christ because He is the only Redeemer. Redemption includes not only the soul but will also ultimately include the whole man—soul and body.

Following the negative and positive imperatives, Christ spoke of the Father's house (oikia, house or dwelling) with its many dwelling places. The Father's house has been interpreted to mean the universe, a place beyond the stars, heaven, the palace of God, paradise, and the Lord's house established by the King of kings. However, to make the Father's house something other than the literal New Jerusalem is not feasible (Rev. 21:2). Christ concluded His antidote for the troubled disciples by saying, "And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also. And you know the way where I am going" (John 14:3, 4 NASB).

The house that has been prepared for Christians has not been made with hands. Its Builder and Maker is God. The word "house" has a variety of applications. In John 14:2, it must be interpreted to suit the analogy of Scripture respecting the inheritance of the saints: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time" (I Pet. 1:3-5 NASB).

God's people inherit the house. The Father's house is real and tangible instead of something indescribable. Christ is the only Person who ever referred to "My Father's house" (John 2:16; 14:2). Heaven is called the Father's house and country (Luke 19:12; Heb. 11:16), city (Heb. 11:10), and eternal kingdom (II Pet. 1:11). The disciples knew the Old Testament well enough to know what Christ was talking about because Christ said, "If it were not so, I would have told you" (John 14:2 NASB).

Christ's comfort concluded on a high note. He said He would come and receive the disciples to Himself, and "...where I am, there you may be also." When the Greek word ego is joined to eimi, as it is in Christ's statement, it is used for emphasis. Therefore, He said, "...I will receive you to Myself in order that where I Myself am, you also may be" (John 14:3—translation). This means that Christ will receive (present middle indicative of paralambano) His own out from His mediate presence into His immediate presence.

First Stage of Christ's Second Advent--Part 2

(I Thess. 4:13; II Thess. 2:1-12)

Preached by W.E. Best February 3, 2002

The first epistle to the Thessalonian assembly was written when it was about one year old. Unlike "churches" in this generation, that assembly had been subjected to such great truths as Divine election, positional and conditional sanctification, and the second coming of Christ. The apostle Paul had been informed of the condition of the assembly, which necessitated his writing two epistles to correct some problems that involved eschatology, and conditional sanctification. The language of the epistles indicates that there was no doubt in the minds of the Christians there that Christ was coming, but they had been disturbed.

The true expositor of Scripture takes a complex subject (intricate, like the Trinity or hypostatic union of Christ's two natures) and is never satisfied until he can convince the sheep of God that it is the voice of truth. Paul stated it succinctly: "Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, handling accurately the word of truth. But avoid worldly and empty chatter, for it will lead to further ungodliness, and their talk will spread like gangrene..." (II Tim. 2:15-17 NASB). Verses 16-17 prove that false teachers take a truth that is plainly stated and exchange it for poison. (See Rom. 1:25.)

Paul's two epistles to the assembly at Thessalonica magnify Christ's second advent. Christ's coming is an incentive in the first Epistle: (1) It is an incentive to hope: "...wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, that is Jesus, who delivers us from the wrath to come" (1:10 NASB). (2) It is an incentive to a faithful ministry: "For who is our hope or joy or crown of exultation? Is it not even you, in the presence of our Lord Jesus at His coming?" (2:19 NASB). (3) It is an incentive to "...increase and abound in love for one another, and for all men, just as we also do for you; so that He may establish your hearts unblamable in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all His saints" (3:12, 13 NASB). (4) It is an incentive to comfort one another with the message: "...the Lord Himself will descend from heaven..." and "...we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and thus we shall always be with the Lord" (4:16, 17 NASB). (5) It is an incentive to holiness of life: "Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete, without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ" (5:23 NASB).

Christ's coming gives comfort to the persecuted in the second Epistle. Soon after Paul's first letter, he received reports of a false verbal message and a forged letter that involved the apostle. His eschatology was challenged; therefore, the apostle necessarily gave a warning to the assembly, which was a model to others: "Let no one in any way deceive you, for it [the coming of Jesus Christ, and our gathering together to Him] will not come unless the apostasy comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction" (II Thess. 2:3

NASB). Two things precede the day of the Lord: (1) the gathering of the saints to the Lord and (2) the apostasy, which will culminate in the man of lawlessness (II Thess. 2:1-3).

Christians need to quickly know that deception does not end when they are regenerated. The blinding of the mind is removed in the Christian just so far as the light of revealed truth and its application dislodge the deceptive lies of Satan. The verb deceive (exapatao) means to deceive thoroughly or lead astray. It is preceded by the indefinite pronoun anyone (tis), which emphasizes the Christian's responsibility to refuse to allow anyone to lead him astray.

Paul's instruction clearly proves that the matters under consideration were to believers: "But we do not want you to be uninformed, brethren, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve, as do the rest who have no hope" (I Thess. 4:13 NASB). Ignorance (agnoeo, to be ignorant or uninformed—used as a present active infinitive in this verse) concerning any Biblical subject is not advantageous to Christians. The apostle used this Greek word six times in his epistles (Rom. 1:13; 11:25; I Cor. 10:1; 12:1; II Cor. 1:8; I Thess. 4:13). Ignorance here is attributed to brethren. Therefore, Christians are uninformed on any subject until they are instructed. Who can say he is informed on every verse of Holy Scripture? To have read or heard every verse of Scripture read does not indicate that one is instructed. Furthermore, to be informed does not mean that he has been fully informed.

Ignorance of God's word, which results in sinful grief, applies to Christians. Sinful grief is the result of Christians not having the Biblical concept of death. Christianity does not destroy human passions because Christians do not part with their old nature in regeneration. However, grace enables them to appropriate spiritual instruction concerning death, and their grief is transformed into joy. Therefore, the radius of hope is reduced or expanded in proportion to the instruction a Christian possesses.

Paul wanted the Thessalonian saints to know with absolute certainty that their bodies, not less than their souls, belonged to Christ by redemption: "For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now. And not only this, but also we ourselves, having the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body" (Rom. 8:22, 23 NASB). Death was intended for punishment because of sin: "Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned" (Rom. 5:12 NASB). However, death for the elect has been transformed into blessing. Therefore, Paul was inspired to write, "...do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, or of me His prisoner; but join with me in suffering for the gospel according to the power of God, who has saved us, and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was granted us in Christ Jesus from all eternity, but

now has been revealed by the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death, and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel" (II Tim. 1:8-10 NASB).

No greater truth has ever come from God to His chosen ones than the death of death in the death of Jesus Christ. Physical death to the Christian is only his disrobing that which is corruptible in order to be robed with that which is incorruptible (I Cor. 15:50-58). Looking at death from the standpoint (the mental position from which a person views things) of time, it means to terminate the conflict, finish the race, and reach the goal. Christ's second coming is the grand climax to which Scripture points, providence oversees and cares, and hope patiently waits. Hence, the Thessalonian saints could be comforted only by knowing that those who were departing by means of death would share in the first resurrection as much as those who are alive when Christ comes.

Physical death to the Christian is compared with sleep. A statement often repeated is, "The act of dying is the same in all." However, this statement must be examined. There is an important difference between the deaths of Christians and non-Christians. The Christian's dying act has the comfort of Christ's presence: "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil; for Thou art with me..." (Ps. 23:4 NASB). Conversely, in the non-Christian's dying act he may experience some well-wishers waiting to see what they may get when he takes his last breath. There will be no angels to escort him into heaven. This, however, does not remove the truth of God's omnipresence. As God cannot be measured by time, He cannot be limited by space. No place can be without God, and no place can contain Him. Therefore, God is present with all by Deity, but only in His saints by the presence of a gracious efficacy. God is in the world by His providence, in the heart of the Christian by grace, in the heart of the sinner by inspection, and in hell by His justice.

Man is passive in regeneration, and he is also passive in the act of dying. God not only gives life, but He also takes it: "For I know that Thou wilt bring me to death And to the house of meeting for all living" (Job 30:23 NASB). Diseases and accidents are often represented as causes of death, but the act of dying is in God's hands. Although a wound is self-inflicted, the act of dying is in the hand of God: "The LORD kills, and makes alive; He bring down to Sheol [grave, KJV] and raises up" (I Sam. 2:6 NASB). The instruments of death themselves are under God's control. He can either restrain or not restrain disease or an inflicted wound.

As the Christian does not observe the change that was wrought in his heart when he was regenerated, he does not note the change that takes place in the act of dying. As one is not conscious of the act of going to sleep, the Christian will not be conscious of the act of dying. Furthermore, as regeneration placed the chosen sinner into the body of Christ, the act of dying admits him into eternity. Death is related to the mortality that resides in the bodies of saints, but Christ's death for them has transformed the whole concept of death into what is called sleep.

A description of deceased Christians is that in sleep one has no awareness of time. Actually, the sense of time has been removed from deceased Christians because they are in eternity with the great “I am.” From the perspective of eternity, there is no gap between the death of the Christian and the coming of Jesus Christ. However, from the perspective of time, which is filled with death and destruction, there is an interval between them. Men cannot think of these two spheres of reality together. Therefore, they cannot synchronize the clock of timelessness with their clock of temporal time. Hidden in the “until we meet again” is the eternal now. This is true because it is the truth of Jesus Christ, the “I am” (John 8:58).

The meaning of John 8:58 must be considered in order to better understand the timelessness of eternity. Christ said to the Jews, “Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it, and was glad. The Jews therefore said to Him, You are not yet fifty years old, and have You seen Abraham? Jesus said to them, Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was born, I am. Therefore they picked up stones to throw at Him; but Jesus hid Himself, and went out of the temple” (John 8:56-59 NASB). This proves the religious Jews knew nothing about Christ’s eternity.

The following facts should be observed from John 8:56-59—(1) the time before Abraham (Gen. 11:26), (2) the time of Abraham, who was born 2008 years subsequent to Adam and lived 175 years (Gen. 25:7, 8), and (3) the time when Christ spoke of Abraham nearly 2000 years subsequent to Abraham (John 8). The eternal Son of God proved His eternity by placing Himself before Abraham, but He went further to prove His eternity by making the time before Abraham the time of Abraham. The time He was speaking coincided with the present active indicative of the verb eimi with the pronoun ego—ego eimi, “I Myself am.” Jesus Christ did not say, “Before Abraham was born I was,” but “before Abraham came into existence I Myself AM.”

When the Christian steps out of time, he no longer lives in the flow of temporality, but he lives in terms of the relationship of the dead in Christ. This relationship is one of immediacy, which is without any intermediate agency. There is no time interval projected into it. The word “until” is extinct from the glorified Christian’s vocabulary. In the glorified state, everything is absolutely heavenly because it is new—new creature, new man, new and living way, new name, new heaven, new earth, new song, new Jerusalem (the holy city). The Lord said, “Behold, I am making all things new” (Rev. 21:5 NASB).

Consider the following questions:

1. Is there a long night of disembodiment between death and resurrection?
2. What does “until the coming of the Lord” mean for the deceased Christian?
3. Is the soul asleep until the resurrection?
4. Did Paul shrink from the idea of dying?
5. Will Christ bring disembodied saints to receive their glorified bodies when He comes for His own?
6. Can disembodied saints be considered perfected?
7. How can perfect saints in eternity be brought into time to be perfected?
8. What is the Christian’s status (position, state, or condition) subsequent to death?

First Stage of Christ's Second Advent--Part 3

(I Thess. 4:14)

W.E. Best

Paul's message to the Thessalonians concerning the first phase of Christ's second advent was restricted to Christians because Christians alone can understand spiritual things (I Cor. 2:1-16). Pagans' noble utterances on the subject of immortality must be rejected. The grief of non-believers is a wail of despair, whether mild—based on the wrong concept of immortality—or severe—without any concept of immortality.

The major premise on which the following propositions depend is bathed in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ: "For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus" (I Thess. 4:14 NASB). There are two divisions in this verse: (1) The hope of Christ's coming is based on His death and resurrection. (2) The purpose of His coming is revealed: "...God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus."

The certainty of faith is emphasized in the statement "For if we believe." According to the context, there is no doubt that "if" is a first class condition that affirms reality. Since Paul used it in the context of I Thessalonians 1:1-4:12, he was not speaking of an obligation but a fact. The first class condition speaks of the connection between the protasis (the clause expressing the condition in a conditional sentence) and the apodosis (the clause expressing the consequence in a conditional sentence). Therefore, the translation can be "For since we believe." When one considers the first class condition connected with the reality of the present active indicative (the mood of reality) verb *pisteuo*, he does not question the reality of God-given faith.

A climate of easy believism causes the Christian to carefully examine even the faith that increases in some knowledge of the Scriptures. The thing to look for at this point is how the word of God is being appropriated. Christ said, "If any man is willing to do His will, he shall know of the teaching, whether it is of God, or whether I speak from Myself" (John 7:17 NASB). Men know of this world only because they are born into it and live in it. No one can see the world of faith and understand it until his eyes are opened by the grace of God. As the material world has its own law and is measured by its own standard, the spiritual world has its own law and is measured by its own standard. As Christians have certainty about this world because it is a matter of experience, they have certainty about God-given faith because it becomes a matter of experience. The Biblical formula (a formal statement of Christian doctrine) can be stated in a few words. God who requires faith in the elect works faith in them when they are regenerated. Saving faith is not only the ability to see Jesus Christ in conversion deliverance, but it is also the ability to appropriate the eternal Son of God. Saving faith produces acts of grace, but not the principle of grace.

No one can receive that which is spiritual until he has been given the disposition to receive it. The Bible gives God credit for what Arminians credit to man's so-called free will. Through faith the regenerated person receives Jesus Christ into his consciousness. Faith is the operation of God's grace that was legally given to each chosen person from eternity (II Tim. 1:9).

Since saving (converting) faith is the reaction to God's act of Divine quickening, converting faith is not a human contribution to being made alive in Christ. Regeneration changes the soil of the heart before the revelation of Jesus Christ in the gospel finds lodgement. Only then can one understand that "...it [the gospel] is the power of God for salvation..." (Rom. 1:16 NASB). By the word of God, one who has been Divinely quickened has an experiential consciousness of life. As the knowledge of natural things is necessary to bring natural faith into exercise, knowledge of spiritual things is required to bring spiritual faith into exercise. The error of the free offer of the gospel is from ignorance of Scripture concerning Paul's mission work. When Paul desired to go to Achaia, Luke wrote, "...the brethren encouraged him and wrote to the disciples to welcome him; and when he had arrived, he helped [aorist middle indicative of *sumballo*, to help or assist] greatly those who had believed [perfect active participle of *pisteuo*, the ones who have believed] through [dia, ablative of means—usually in the instrumental case—rarely in the ablative, which means separation or source case] grace [noun, ablative feminine singular]; for he powerfully refuted the Jews in public, demonstrating by the Scriptures that Jesus was the Christ" (Acts 18:27, 28 NASB).

Christ's earthly name "Jesus" was used in I Thessalonians 4:14 because His human nature died and was raised. God absolutely considered can neither die nor be raised. Jesus Christ is the unique Person. He is equal with the Father but different because He possesses the human nature. Furthermore, He is equal with man (from man's perspective) but different because He possesses a Divine nature. During Christ's earthly ministry, He spoke of God as "I and the Father are one" (John 10:30 NASB); as Man He said, "I am thirsty" (John 19:28 NASB); and as the God-Man, He said, "Come to Me...I will give you rest" (Matt. 11:28 NASB). Therefore, Jesus Christ is the only Mediator between God and men (I Tim. 2:5). He is the surety (guarantee) of a better covenant, the eternal covenant of grace: "so much the more also Jesus has become the guarantee of a better covenant. And the former priests, on the one hand, existed in greater numbers, because they were prevented by death from continuing, but He, on the other hand, because He abides forever, holds His priesthood permanently. Hence, also, He is able to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them" (Heb. 7:22-25 NASB). "Now the God of peace, who brought up from the dead the great Shepherd of the sheep through the blood of the eternal covenant, even Jesus our Lord, equip you in every good thing to do His will, working in us that which is pleasing in His sight,

through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen” (Heb. 13:20, 21 NASB).

The legal side of suretyship is stronger when the Surety becomes the substitute for the debtor by having the debt charged to the Surety and the debtor released. Scripture gives a good example in Onesimus. He was legally released before the debt was actually paid to the creditor. Paul made this possible by assuming the debt (Philem. 10, 18, 19). In this way only could the Old Testament saints be forgiven before the death of the Testator: “And this is clearer still, if another priest arises according to the likeness of Melchizedek, who has become such not on the basis of a law of physical requirement, but according to the power of an indestructible life. For it is witnessed of Him, THOU ART A PRIEST FOREVER ACCORDING TO THE ORDER OF MELCHIZEDEK” (Heb. 7:15-17 NASB). “Being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith. This was to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed; for the demonstration, I say, of His righteousness at the present time, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus” (Rom 3:24-26 NASB).

This brings in the purpose for the first phase of Christ’s second advent, “...even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus” (I Thess. 4:14 NASB). Surely every Christian wants to know what is meant by this statement. Some say it refers to disembodied spirits that descend with Jesus Christ who will raise their bodies in which they go forth to meet Christ in the air. Others think Christ is the connecting link (dia) between those that sleep (aorist passive participle of koimao) and their resurrection. Others teach that Christ is the instrument through whom God brings to pass the resurrection.

Moses and Elijah were in their glorified bodies when they appeared on the Mount of Transfiguration (Matt. 17:1-13). They represent not only the Law and the prophets, but also the saints who die and those who will be raptured. The statement “God will bring [ago] with Him” (I Thess. 4:14) implies that all the deceased saints will come with Jesus Christ when He comes for the living saints. An understanding of the way the verb ago is used in the Scriptures will help to interpret the statement “...even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus” (I Thess. 4:14 NASB). The verb ago, which means to bring, is not used when speaking of the resurrection. The verb egeiro, which means to cause to rise or to awake from sleep, is used when the resurrection is considered. Therefore, the resurrection itself does not fit the statement. However, it does fit that which follows the resurrection. Those who were falling asleep in Jesus were the concern of the saints in Thessalonica.

The only feasible interpretation of the two stages of Christ’s second advent is that the Lord gave Paul a special revelation on the distinction between the resurrection and translation (change to another form). Christ’s valedictory

discourse revealed His purpose to return for His own (John 14:1-3). Enoch and Elijah exemplify the truth of the rapture (Heb. 11:5; II Kings 2:1, 11). Since the word of God is the basis for all instruction, who can question that Paul was inspired to give information on eschatology?

Paul, who had the care of all the assemblies, was inspired to give information that has kept God's people on track for two thousand years. Hence, the true assemblies have not lost confidence in the Lord's coming. This expectancy has increased the longing, brightened the hope, and clarified the promise (Rom. 8). An understanding of II Corinthians 5:1-10 refutes purgatory, soul sleep, disembodiment, and a temporary body between death and resurrection. (Study I Cor. 15:50-58.)

First Stage of Christ's Second Advent--Part 4 (I Thess. 4:15-18)

The saints in Thessalonica were concerned about Christians who had fallen asleep “in” (dia, ablative of agency meaning through the intermediate agency of) Jesus. Although both the KJV and NASB translate the preposition dia asleep “in” Jesus, a study of this passage will prove that translation is questionable. The better translation could be “So also God will bring the ones who had fallen [aorist passive participle] asleep through the intermediate agency of Jesus.” What appeared to the Christians in Thessalonica to be the long night of death for all the saints who had died was reduced to a mathematical point—eternity. There was no past or future for the deceased but only an eternal present. Therefore, the dead in Christ live in terms of no time interval projected into it. No wonder John wrote, “...Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on! Yes, says the Spirit, that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow with them” (Rev. 14:13 NASB).

Beginning with I Thessalonians 4:15, Paul gave the answer to the problem troubling the Thessalonian saints. The apostle wrote from the viewpoint of a close personal association with those under his care. He was daily burdened by the moral, personal, and doctrinal problems brought to him by the assemblies. However, there was more to his concern than settling opposing factions (I Cor. 1:10-17), disciplining the immoral (I Cor. 5:5), resolving personal disputes (I Cor. 6:1-8; Phil. 4:2, 3), and correcting doctrinal error (I Thess. 4:17; 2:1-5; II Thess. 3:12-16). Paul's concern made great demands on his love. He drew attention to two complementary aspects of his love—sympathy for the weak and indignation for the offenders: “Who is weak without my being weak? Who is led into sin without my intense concern?” (II Cor. 11:29 NASB).

Paul's words were authoritative: “For this [touto] we say to you by the word of the Lord...” (I Thess. 4:15 NASB). The demonstrative pronoun “this” (touto) refers to the things that follow. What Paul had to say was not his subjective opinion, but the word of God settled in heaven. The plural pronoun “we” included himself with the brethren to whom he was writing. Some have speculated from the following statement that Paul believed he would be alive when Christ comes: “...that we who are alive, and remain until the coming of the Lord, shall not precede those who have fallen asleep” (I Thess. 4:15 NASB). The pronoun “we” in this verse cannot be used to indicate that he believed he would be alive when the Lord comes. Although some make the argument, they evidently have forgotten some of the statements made by the apostle: “For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain” (Phil. 1:21 NASB). “But even if I am being poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I rejoice and share my joy with you all” (Phil. 2:17 NASB). “For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come” (II Tim. 4:6 NASB). If one should argue that Paul believed he would be alive at the rapture when he used the pronoun “we,” he would have had to include all the brethren to whom he wrote: “knowing that

He who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and will present us with you” (II Cor. 4:14 NASB). “Who died for us, that whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with Him” (I Thess. 5:10 NASB). The plural pronoun “we” was only a conversational way of speaking to those who were troubled by some things they were hearing. He was neither affirming nor denying whether he would be alive when Christ comes.

Paul used the personal pronoun “we” when speaking of the rapture. This pronoun refers to that part of the assembly that will be alive at the first stage of Christ’s second advent. The time of Christ’s coming was unknown to Paul; therefore, the apostle correctly used the pronoun “we.” The following Scriptures do not contradict I Thessalonians 4:15 and 17. (1) “FOR we know that if the earthly tent which is our house is torn down, we have [present active indicative of echo] a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens” (II Cor. 5:1 NASB). (2) “For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come” (II Tim. 4:6 NASB). (3) “But I am hard-pressed from both directions, having the desire to depart and be with Christ, for that is very much better; yet to remain on in the flesh is more necessary for your sake” (Phil. 1:23, 24 NASB). Since the first advent of Christ, any Christian can use the personal pronoun “we” as Paul did two thousand years ago without contradicting the hope of the future rapture. The fact that Paul desired death or realized his martyrdom was at hand did not alter the time when the rapture will take place. God has an appointed time for everything, including the rapture.

Paul’s last words are, as they were meant to be, his best. Facing martyrdom, the apostle said, “At my first defense no one supported me, but all deserted me; may it not be counted against them. But the Lord stood with me, and strengthened me, in order that through me the proclamation might be fully accomplished, and that all the Gentiles might hear; and I was delivered out of the lion’s mouth. The Lord will deliver me from every evil deed, and will bring me safely to His heavenly kingdom; to Him be the glory forever and ever. Amen” (II Tim. 4:16-18 NASB).

Paul lived a progressively spiritual life, but it was not without hardship, persecution, and suffering. The apostle was forsaken but not forsaken. His times were not in his enemies’ hands (Ps. 31:14-18). He did not receive justice when men tried him, but he was assured of justice at the judgment seat of Christ. No man stood with Paul when men tried him, but the Lord stood with him. If anticipation led to such wonderful praise as he offered in II Timothy 4:18, what will be the reality?

Some say Paul used the word “kingdom” to describe the present “church.” Others say it describes the present dispensation. Scripture says nothing about a heavenly kingdom existing on earth between the first and second advents of Jesus Christ. How can believers enter into what they claim they have already entered—the kingdom? Scripture expresses the truth better than the words of men: “Therefore, brethren, be all the more diligent to make certain about His

calling and choosing you; for as long as you practice these things, you will never stumble; for in this way the entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will be abundantly supplied to you” (II Pet. 1:10, 11 NASB).

Hope is the expectation of something righteous to its highest degree—the personal unmediated presence of Jesus Christ and His eternal kingdom. Therefore, “looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus; who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds” (Titus 2:13, 14 NASB). This passage of Scripture proves they were looking for the Savior, not events.

When Jesus Christ comes for His own, the living will not precede those who have fallen asleep: “For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive, and remain until the coming of the Lord, shall not precede those who have fallen asleep” (I Thess. 4:15 NASB). Paul wanted the living saints to know that they will not precede the deceased saints who lived before them: “For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet of God; and the dead in [en, locative of place] Christ shall rise [future middle indicative of anistemi, to rise, stand up, come, depart, or appear] first [protos, first, before, or earlier—an adjective used as an adverb expressing time]” (I Thess. 4:16 NASB). Although anistemi is translated “rise” in the KJV and the NASB, nothing in Scripture contradicts the translation “appear.” The Greek adjective protos is used here to show that all the deceased saints will appear prior to the change of those who are living.

The descent of Jesus Christ will be with a “shout” with the “trumpet of God.” The future middle indicative of the verb katabaino means “I shall come down for Myself,” and that means His coming is without the intermediate agency of anyone. His coming with a shout means it will be a shout of command as of a general to his army. This reminds the Christian of “Lazarus, come forth” (John 11:43 NASB). However, Lazarus was not resurrected in the sense of the deceased saints or translated living saints who will be clothed with their house not made with hands in the heavens. Lazarus was brought to life from death to die again in time. Since Christ is the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep, their bodies, which were perishable and mortal, will have put on the imperishable and the immortal (I Cor. 15:50-58). When Christ appears, Christians will be like Him: “...We know that, when He appears, we shall be like Him, because we shall see Him just as He is” (I John 3:2 NASB).

The voice of the archangel will be the shout of victory. Jude spoke of Michael the archangel who argued about the body of Moses (Jude 9). Why did the Devil argue about the body of Moses? Was it not in view of the fall and its doom to corruption? There could be no dispute if the body of Moses had been left in the grave. The ground of disputation was that something special was done to Moses’ body. The Lord buried Moses in a valley in the land of Moab (Deut. 34:6).

Michael was appointed to guard Moses' body. Satan saw special treatment given to Moses' body; therefore, he contended with Michael for it. Satan was so strong that Michael had to call on the Lord for assistance. With the coming of Christ for His elect, Michael will give the utterance of victory.

The "trumpet of God" is the signal for assembly meeting. It sounded for the assembly of Israel to mount Sinai as God descended to the mount (Ex. 19:13). When Christ comes, the greatest assembly of saints will be assembled together, including all the chosen ones given to Christ in the covenant of redemption—those for whom He died and for whom He interceded.

The second advent of Christ should not be regarded as simply one act. It embraces a series of acts. The second advent should be considered in the light of the first advent. Christ's first advent embraced a period of thirty-three years with numerous acts that were predicted related to that coming. To compare all the events of Christ's second coming as the instantaneous results of His coming without violating order is impossible.

The announcement of the universality of death, "For as in Adam all die," was followed by the positive declaration, "all shall be made alive." Dying in Adam and being made alive in Christ are not simultaneous occurrences: "For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all shall be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, after that those who are Christ's at His coming, then comes the end, when He delivers up the kingdom to the God and Father, when He has abolished all rule and all authority and power" (I Cor. 15:22-24 NASB). The morning star appears before the day dawns, and the sun shines during the day. Jesus Christ is both the star and the sun. As the morning star, Christ will be seen by few, but all will see Him as the sun of righteousness (Rev. 22:16; Mal. 4:2).

I Thessalonians 4:13-17 is not parallel with Matthew 24:29-31. There may be certain similarities, but there are notable differences in the two passages. Only by ascertaining the proper interpretation of these two passages can one discover whether the elect of all ages will be resurrected before, during, or after the great tribulation. (Study I Cor. 15:20-24; I Thess. 4:13-17; Matt. 27:52.)

15 Rules for Interpreting Bible Prophecy*

W.E. Best

1. The most common meaning should be literal unless a different meaning is forced upon the interpreter.
2. When a word or phrase admits of two or more interpretations the one must be chosen which harmonizes with the context.
3. When every word in a passage can receive a literal interpretation in harmony with the text, context and the over all context of Scripture, that passage must be interpreted as literal.
4. If a word or a phrase literally interpreted will not harmonize with the rest of the context, that word or phrase is figurative.
5. A prophetic symbol is a person or thing present representing some person or thing future.
6. Future tense prophecy is never symbolic in the interpretation of prophetic symbols. The present and the future tenses are always employed.
7. Prophetic symbols were seen either in a dream or in a vision and therefore they were always present to the beholder.
8. Prophetic symbols are interpreted by words never by other symbols.
9. A "saying" is composed of words thus the words mean the same in visions and dreams.
10. "Time" whether in hours, days, weeks, months, years or times is always literal with the exception of Ezekiel 4:4-6 where days do stand for years. Because they were acted out and the scale of representation declared. (It was given in context)
11. "Numbers" are never symbolic. (In Ezekiel 4:4-6 the days are symbolic not the numbers 40 and 390.)
12. In the direct interpretation of a prophetic symbol, the following is the order:
 1. The symbol
 2. The neuter verb
 3. The interpretationThe inferior is the first and the superior is the second.
13. In a metaphors declaration the superior is the first and the inferior is the third. Counting the word "to be" as the second.

14. Whenever the interpretation of a prophetic symbol can be properly substituted for the symbol itself, the associated words are not symbolic. (They are either literal or figurative)

15. The place of the symbol will be the place of fulfillment.

Illustrations

1. God is a rock. Deut. 32:4 (This is a figure of speech)

2. Ezekiel was a symbol. Ezekiel 4:4-6 (He represented the Israelites first and Judahites second.)

3. A horn represents a king. Dan. 7:8, 24

4. A woman represents that great city. Rev. 17:18

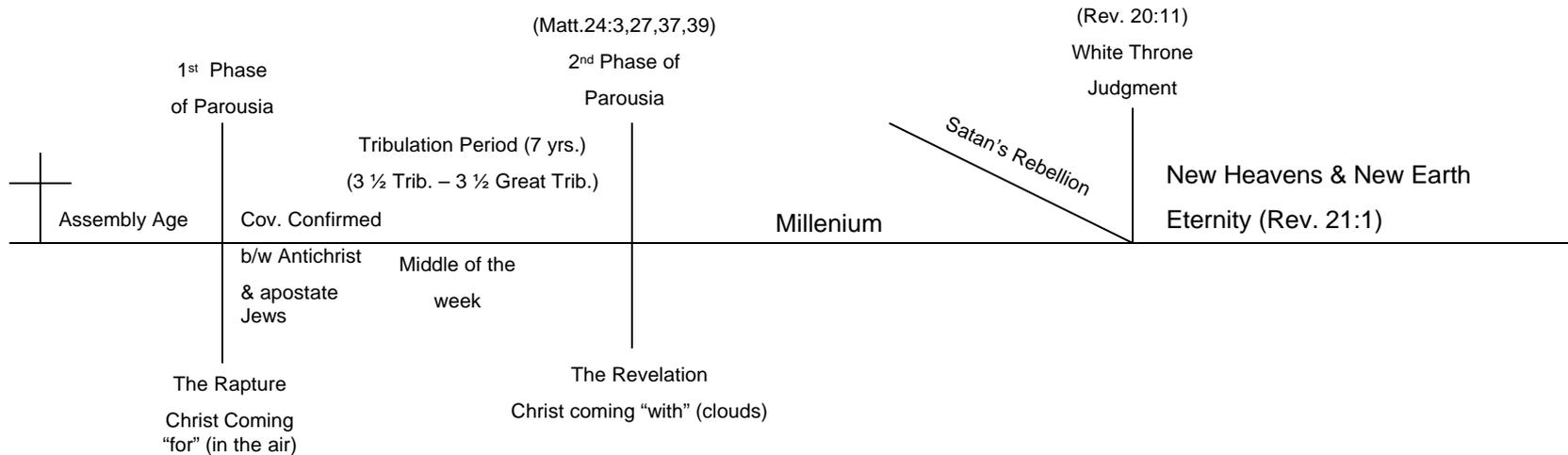
5. If language describes what the symbol represents, it is not symbolic.

*These rules were given at the close of the message "The Study of Prophecy" on 10-21-92 a.m.

The Second Coming of Christ Chart

A Premillennial View prepared by Spring Assembly of Christ

<http://springassemblyofchrist.org>



Premillennialism Notes:

Premillennialism and Dispensationalism are not synonymous terms. All Dispensationalists are Premillennialists, but all Premillennialists are not Dispensationalists.

Premillennialists say the Olivet discourse points to two things:

1. The NOW historic destruction of Jerusalem.
2. The FUTURE coming of Jesus Christ to consummate the age (not time).

Gentile domination began with Nebuchadnezzar and will continue until the restoration of the Kingdom of Israel at the 2nd Parousia of the Son of Man. Scripture is clear in showing that this present age is called "the times of the Gentiles" (Lk. 21:24; 17:22), and not the time of the Messianic King.

No subject has caused more controversy than the rapture of the saints. It may not appear to some to be a truth of such great importance, but a diligent study of such subjects as:

1. The time of the Gentiles.
2. Israel
3. The Assembly that Christ is continuing to build
4. The Tribulation Period
5. The Resurrection
6. The Kingdom

These subjects are all involved. So if you positionize yourself on one point it will disclose what you believe about other subjects.