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James O. Wilbur

The SECOND COMING of CHRIST AND "THE MILLENNIUM"

By H. LEO BOLES

Scripture—"And inasmuch as it is appointed unto men once to die, and after this cometh judgment; so Christ also, having been once offered to bear the sins of many, shall appear a second time, apart from sin, to them that wait for him, unto salvation." (Heb. 9: 27, 28.)

Introduction

Why study this subject? What practical value in studying it? Why not ignore it? It is claimed that it only makes for controversy, and that a discussion of it tends to divide churches and separate Christians; it is furthermore claimed that this subject and kindred subjects should be let alone, for Christians cannot agree on them; hence, it is best not to investigate or study them. Also some claim that the second coming of Christ is purely "speculative" and, like many other subjects, does not yield any practical good in living the Christian life. What difference does it make in our living? is asked by some; we need not be concerned about the secret things of God; hence, we should avoid the study of them, some affirm. Such attitudes are unsound, and such claims present false views with respect to this New Testament doctrine.

The second coming of Christ is a "speculative subject" only to those who "speculate" concerning it. One may "speculate" on this subject, but it may be studied without speculation. In fact one may "speculate" and "theorize"

on "the atonement," "the Trinity," and "the deity of Jesus." There is confusion and division among the professed followers of Christ on this subject, but that is no reason why the subject should not be studied; there are very few, if any, phases of New Testament doctrine upon which there is no division, and we do not refrain from studying and teaching these because of the division of sentiment on them; so neither should we refrain from studying the second coming of Christ because all are not agreed upon it. Many divisions of sentiment exist on the doctrine of the deity of Jesus Christ and his vicarious death; yet one cannot ignore these subjects because people are divided on them. There are differences of teaching with regard to certain phases and details of the second coming of Christ, but there is unanimity of belief with regard to the great truth itself. That Jesus will "appear a second time, apart from sin, to them that wait for him" is a declaration of inspiration which is too simple to be misunderstood and too emphatic to be denied; there is no one who believes in Christ's first advent but that also believes in his second coming.

The fact that the New Testament teaches that Christ will come again is sufficient reason why the subject should be studied. Because it has to do with future things and events is no reason for neglecting or ignoring the study of it. "Every scripture inspired of God is also profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for instruction which is in righteousness: that the man of God may be complete, furnished completely unto every good work." (2 Tim. 3: 16, 17.) "Every scripture," not just a few, or even many, but "every scripture" which is given by inspiration "is also profitable for teaching." Hence great good may be derived from studying what the New Testament teaches on the second coming of Christ. It is true that "the secret things belong unto Jehovah our God," but it is equally true that "the things that are revealed belong unto us and to our children for ever." (Deut. 29: 29.) Since the revealed things belong unto us, why then should we refuse to study them and claim that they cannot be understood? The second coming of Christ is a New Testament subject, and students of the New Testament have a right, yea, are enjoined, to study reverently and prayerfully all that God has revealed.

The Subject Made Clear

Progress may be made in any study and a true conception gained if we understand clearly the subject. There should be no side-stepping of the main issue, no evading any of the facts, no suppressing any of the scriptural texts in a fair investigation and study of this question. The issue should stand out in the blazing sunlight of the truth of God without any shadow dimming or obscuring it. Those phases of the question that may have been confused with the main issue should be removed at such a distance that the question involved may stand out alone so that he who runs may read. It is no small task to clear a subject of all irrelevant matter, and keep it so in an investigation, yet this is needful for clearness and accuracy.

There are different senses in which Christ is said to "come." In comforting his disciples, Jesus said, "I will not leave you desolate: I come unto you." Again he said, "If a man love me, he will keep my word: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him." And again he said, "Ye heard how I said to you, I go away, and I come unto you." (John 14: 18, 23, 28.) Jesus came to his disciples after he was crucified and raised from the dead. Again he came with the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost; it is claimed that he came at the destruction of Jerusalem. There are a number of senses in which the Lord comes, as the Old Testament taught that God came to his people in different ways. "Our God cometh, and doth not keep silence." (Ps. 50: 3.) "Behold, Jehovah rideth upon a swift cloud, and cometh unto Egypt." (Isa. 19: 1.) "For, behold, Jehovah cometh forth out of his place, and will come down, and tread upon the high places of the earth." (Mic. 1: 3.) "And Jehovah my God shall come, and all the holy ones with" him. (Zech. 14: 5.) These passages, and many others of like import, show us how common it was with the prophets to represent the providential presence and activity of God in human affairs as "the coming of Jehovah," and how familiar such symbolic language was to the readers of the Old Testament. In like manner the New Testament declares that Jesus comes in certain senses. "I come to thee, and will move thy candlestick out of its place, except thou repent." (Rev. 2: 5.) "I come quickly: hold fast that which thou hast, that no one take thy crown." (Rev. 3: 11.) Christ did "come" in judgment upon these churches, but there is also a final

and personal coming of the Christ which is to be distinguished from these other comings. The Divine family consists of three—God the Father, Christ his Son, and the Holy Spirit the Comforter. Jesus said that when he returned to the Father he would send the Holy Spirit. (John 14: 26.) The Holy Spirit and Christ were and are two distinct personages; they may be alike in nature, but they are not identical in person; hence, the coming of the Holy Spirit, or the coming of Christ in the Holy Spirit, does not mean the second advent of Christ. Jesus' coming in providential judgments at different times must not be confused with his personal advent.

Death to an individual is not the personal coming of Christ. By no fair and logical interpretation of the scripture can death be substituted for his second coming. The death of an individual is, to all practical purposes, the same as if Christ had come to that individual, for death to one is the close of time and the opening of an unchanging eternity. There may be some points of analogy between the death of an individual and the event of Christ's second coming, but it in no way can be fairly substituted for his coming. Many have shifted to the background the personal coming of Christ and have kept in the foreground death; they live in view of death instead of living in the fear of God and the coming of Christ. This does violence to scriptural teaching.

Nearly all of the twenty-seven books of the New Testament contain declarations and predictions on the second coming of Christ. Some entire chapters seem to be devoted to this subject, and almost the entire books of First and Second Thessalonians and Revelation treat on this subject. Each chapter of First Thessalonians closes with a reference to it. (See 1: 10; 2: 19; 3: 13; 4: 14-18; 5: 23.) The personal coming of Christ is expressed in the Greek text by several words, but "parousia" and "epiphaneia" are translated to denote the personal presence and coming of our Lord. "Parousia" occurs twenty-two times in the New Testament, and in each of these places it denotes and can denote only a personal presence of the person of whom it is predicted. Paul said that he was glad because of the "parousia" of Stephanas (1 Cor. 16: 17), and because of the "parousia" of Titus (2 Cor. 7: 6). Again he tells us that the Corinthians said that his "parousia," "bodily presence," was weak (2 Cor. 10: 10), and he hoped that his "parousia" among

the Philippians would be an occasion of joy (Phil. 1: 26), and that they may not obey, as in his "parousia" only, but also in his absence. In 2 Thess. 2: 9, we read of the "parousia" of "the man of sin." In all of these instances the word denotes the personal presence of the one to whom it refers. So in all the other uses of the word it refers to the personal coming of our Lord.

It is clear that the New Testament teaches frequently the personal return of Christ. The angels said to his apostles, "While they were looking stedfastly into heaven as he went, behold two men stood by them in white apparel; who also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye looking into heaven? this Jesus, who was received up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye beheld him going into heaven." (Acts 1: 10, 11.) Hence, faithful children of God look for the personal return of Jesus; he will as surely return in person the second time as he came in person at his first advent. The expectation of his personal return has been the hope and comfort of the Lord's people since he ascended to the Father. "This Jesus," said the angels, "who was received up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye beheld him going into heaven." The issue is now clear; the scriptural teaching is emphatic. *Jesus will come the second time in person.*

The New Testament Teaching

We need not go to the Old Testament for the doctrine of the second coming of Christ. It has been claimed that the Old Testament abounds in predictions of his second coming, but these references may not be clear enough for emphasis, and may be misunderstood or misinterpreted. We do know that the New Testament teaches the second coming of Christ so clearly, frequently, and prominently that it is not necessary to go to the prophecies of the Old Testament for instruction on this subject. Not only are there many New Testament passages bearing on this subject with clearness and force, but they are too numerous to give place to all of them in this study; hence, only a few of them are mentioned here. It is surprising to those who have not made a close study of this subject to find so many clear and definite predictions in the New Testament. No doubtful scripture will be used in this study—only those passages which are clear, definite, and undisputed will be

given. No narrow inductions, no doubtful conclusions will be made; it will make for clearness to use just such simple and clear declarations of the New Testament that prove conclusively the personal return of Christ.

We live between the two advents of Christ; the church exists and must fill its mission between them. Jesus' second appearing is the polestar of the church; it is held forth in the New Testament as the hope of individuals and the church. These scriptures should be studied as they unmistakably and undisputedly refer to the personal second advent of Christ. (Matt. 16: 26, 27; Luke 19: 13; Acts 1: 11; 1 Cor. 1: 7, 8; 3: 13; 11: 26; Col. 3: 4, 5; Phil. 1: 6, 9, 10; 3: 20; 1 Thess. 1: 9, 10; 2: 19; 3: 13; 4: 14-18; 5: 23; 2 Thess. 2: 1-9; Jas. 5: 7; 1 Pet. 1: 13; 4: 12, 13; 2 Tim. 4: 8; 1 John. 2: 28; 3: 2, 3; Jude 14: 15; Rev. 1: 7; 2: 25, etc.) These scriptures could be multiplied indefinitely. Jesus promised to return, and a simple declaration from him concerning his second advent settles the question about his return. He said, "But when the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the angels with him, then shall he sit on the throne of his glory." (Matt. 25: 31.) "And if I go and prepare a place for you, I come again, and will receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also." (John 14: 3.)

The second coming of Christ is the blessed hope of the Lord's people; its place in the Christian system is as important as his first coming. In fact the second coming of Christ is the counterpart of his first coming; his two advents are like two hemispheres, they compose the sphere, or complete the Redeemer's work of redeeming man. He came "once at the end of the ages" and has appeared "to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself," so he "shall appear a second time, apart from sin, to them that wait for him, unto salvation." (Heb. 9: 26-28.) As the grace of the first coming is received by faith, so the glory of the second coming is anticipated by hope. It is clear and conclusive that the New Testament teaches the second coming of Christ.

Manner of Christ's Second Coming

A brief comparison of the first and second advents of Jesus may be instructive. The prophetic declarations regarding Christ's *first coming* have been minutely and

definitely fulfilled. He was to be of the seed of the woman (Gen. 3: 15; Matt. 1: 18; Luke 1: 35; Gal. 4: 4); of the promised seed of Abraham (Gen. 12: 3; 17: 1-22; Matt. 1: 1); of the royal line of David (2 Sam. 7: 12-29; Matt. 1: 1; 22: 42-45); to be born in Bethlehem (Mic. 5: 2; Matt. 2: 1-10); of the tribe of Judah (Gen. 49: 10; Matt. 2: 5; Heb. 7: 14); born of a virgin (Isa. 7: 14-19; 9: 6; Matt. 1: 18-25; Luke 1: 26-38); gifts were to be presented to him (Ps. 72: 10; Matt. 2: 11); one of his followers should betray him (Ps. 41: 9; John 13: 2, 18-27); his death should be by piercing (crucifixion), although stoning was then, and even in our Lord's day, the Jewish method of putting people to death (Isa. 53: 5; Zech. 12: 10; Matt. 27: 38; Mark 15: 25; Luke 23: 33). Even the casting of lots for his garments was predicted and fulfilled. (Ps. 22: 18; John 19: 23, 24.) Many other instances could be added to the list of specific predictions regarding Christ's first coming and the minute fulfillment of them. All the Messianic prophecies concerning the first advent of Christ have been fulfilled as the New Testament history records.

Since the predictions by the prophets concerning the first advent of Christ have been so specifically and minutely fulfilled in detail, we may be as equally certain of the fulfillment of all the scriptures pertaining to his second coming. At his first advent, Jesus was born as a babe and was helpless in the arms of an obscure peasant mother; wicked men sought to destroy him in his infancy; he grew quietly into maturity and quietly entered upon his public work; he suffered and was tempted in the flesh, was crucified and buried, and was raised from the dead. He was clothed with humility while in the flesh and seemingly suffered defeat; his first advent was so lowly and contrary to the expectations of men that he was rejected. At his second advent he will come as the risen, ascended, glorified, and triumphant Lord of men and angels. It is predicted that he will come "with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God" (1 Thess. 4: 16); that he will return "on the clouds" (Matt. 24: 30), and "in his glory" (Matt. 25: 31); that he will come the second time "in the glory of his Father with his angels" (Matt. 16: 27); that he will come "on the clouds of heaven" (Matt. 26: 64; 14: 62). Jesus drew a vivid picture of his regal splendor in these words, "But when the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the

angels with him, then shall he sit on the throne of his glory: and before him shall be gathered all the nations." (Matt. 25: 31, 32.) His second advent will be in triumph and victory as he will come to pass judgment. At his second coming he will appear "apart from sin, to them that wait for him." (Heb. 9: 28.) In his regal glory he will deliver the kingdom back to his Father. (1 Cor. 15: 20-28.) What a contrast between his first and second advent!

Jesus came to earth nearly two thousand years ago; this was his first advent; he came in the flesh at that time clothed in deep humility. He is to come again some time in the future; this will be his second advent; the next time he will come clothed with all of the regal authority that he now possesses and with great glory and a company of angels. We look back to the first advent with faith and forward to the second with hope. What will be the manner of his second coming? He will come with great publicity as befits the royalty which he now has. He warned his disciples while on earth by saying, "Behold, I have told you beforehand. If therefore they shall say unto you, Behold, he is in the wilderness; go not forth: Behold, he is in the inner chambers; believe it not. 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." (Matt. 24: 25-27; Mark 13: 21-23.) There will be no chance of mistake, no room for any deceivers to mislead the people. "If any man shall say unto you, Lo, here is the Christ; or, Lo, there; believe it not: for there shall arise false Christs and false prophets, and shall show signs and wonders, that they may lead astray, if possible, the elect. But take ye heed: behold, I have told you all things beforehand." (Mark 13: 21-23.) Christ will be revealed universally, not as at his first advent, when wise men came from the East inquiring, "Where is he that is born King of the Jews?" (Matt. 2: 2.) When he comes the second time "every eye shall see him, and they that pierced him." (Rev. 1: 7.)

What shall be the manner of his coming? The Lord's return will be so sudden and unexpected that the most appropriate and frequent figure to characterize it is that of the "thief in the night." This figure was used by Christ himself (Matt. 24: 43); it was also used by Paul (1 Thess. 5: 2); and by Peter, "the day of the Lord will come as a thief" (2 Pet. 3: 10); John also used this figure

to show the sudden and unexpected return of our Lord. "If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee" (Rev. 3: 3); and again, "Behold, I come as a thief" (Rev. 16: 15). The angels said to the disciples, "Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye looking into heaven? this Jesus, who was received up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye beheld him going into heaven." (Acts 1: 11.) He suddenly ascended from earth to heaven, and he will suddenly appear the second time. Even if it should be claimed that the phrase, "in like manner," simply refers to the fact of Christ's return, and not to the manner of it, the distinction is of no serious weight, as he went into heaven, so he will come out of heaven.

What is the manner of Christ's second coming? Paul gives a very definite and vivid description of his return. "For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven, with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first; then we that are alive, that are left, shall together with them be caught up in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord." (1 Thess. 4: 16, 17.) It might be held that the precise way in which our Lord will return is a matter of minor importance, and it would be if the New Testament did not describe it; again it would be of minor importance if it were not for the fact that the character of his second advent has a great bearing directly upon the purpose of his coming. Were it not for this fact it would not be so emphasized in this study; it would not be so important as whether he returned on a radiant cloud or a foam-crested wave of the sea; whether he returned in solitary grandeur or surrounded by a convoy of angels; whether he returned with silence and unaccompanied or attended by an angelic choir of celestial trumpeters. But the manner of his coming has a bearing on the purpose of his coming.

In baptism there is a picture which represents the death, the burial, and the resurrection of Christ; these facts belong to his first advent; hence baptism points our minds to his first coming. "Or are ye ignorant that all we who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him through baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we also

might walk in newness of life." (Rom. 6: 3, 4.) "Having been buried with him in baptism, wherein ye were also raised with him through faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead." (Col. 2: 12.) Those who witness a scriptural baptism look upon the picture which calls to mind the tragic close of the first advent of our Lord. While baptism pictures the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus, it also has reference to his second advent. The event of the resurrection of Jesus as pictured in baptism points to a new life here and hereafter. Again, the Lord's Supper has a very prominent place in the teaching of the second coming of Christ. It serves a double function—it points our attention back to the first advent of Christ and then directs attention to his second advent. "For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink the cup, ye proclaim the Lord's death till he come." (1 Cor. 11: 26.) No one can worship God in eating the Lord's Supper without looking forward to the coming of Christ; one purpose of the Lord's Supper is to keep fresh in mind the return of our Lord. The Lord's Supper helps us as we live the Christian life between the two advents of Christ to keep our eye on the polestar of his coming again.

Purpose of Christ's Second Coming

What is the purpose of Christ's second coming? Why should he return? What will he do when he returns? We may be certain that he will do that which he comes to do. He accomplished the Father's will on his first advent, and he will accomplish God's will on his return. There should be no "speculations," no "theorizing," no evading the answer to these questions, no obscure or doubtful inferences, no equivocations with respect to a clear and definite answer to these questions; furthermore, the answers should be as clear, full, definite, positive as the New Testament teaches. Surely there is a definite purpose in the return of our Lord. He had a definite purpose in coming the first time; "the Son of man came to seek and to save that which was lost." (Luke 19: 10.) Nothing is taught more clearly in the New Testament than the purpose of Christ's first advent, and we may look for a definite purpose of his second advent. Since the scriptures bearing on his second coming are as numerous as the prophecies concerning his first advent and since

the work of redemption of man is not complete until Christ comes again, we can affirm with boldness that his second coming has a very specific and definite purpose. He is not coming again to set up a kingdom; his kingdom has been established on earth, and he is now on David's throne ruling his kingdom. (See "Christ on David's Throne" by John T. Hinds.) Christ's kingdom is now here; it began formally on the first Pentecost after the ascension of Christ, and it will continue on earth unchanged, both in character and form, till Christ comes again. So we need not expect him to set up a kingdom when he comes; there is no scripture that teaches that Christ will have two kingdoms on earth, and since he has already established one and that one fulfills all the prophecies concerning his kingdom, we do not expect him to set up another. We must look in another direction for the purpose of his coming again.

In one of the parables of our Lord (Matt. 25: 14-30), Jesus illustrates the significance of his return by describing a man who, before taking a journey to a foreign country, calls his servants together and places his property in their hands, assigning to them in trust the portion that he feels that each is capable of handling. "Now after a long time the lord of those servants cometh, and maketh a reckoning with them," and each is rewarded according to the manner in which he has discharged his responsibility. Christ's return will be distinguished by his measuring out recompenses for faithful service and punishment for disobedience. "And he shall send forth his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other." (Matt. 24: 31; Mark 13: 27.) They shall not only be separated from the mass of mankind, but they shall also be appointed to their eternal destiny. Paul said, "I am already being offered, and the time of my departure is come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give to me at that day; and not to me only, but also to all them that have loved his appearing." (2 Tim. 4: 6-8.) Here it is clearly stated that all the righteous, "them that have loved his appearing," shall be rewarded "at that day" when the Lord comes.

In the description of the final judgment (Matt. 25: 31-46) Jesus affirmed that "all the nations" shall appear before Christ at his coming, and this expression must include all who are dead, as well as those who will be living at his coming. "Marvel not at this: for the hour cometh, in which all that are in the tombs 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 judgment." (John 5: 28, 29.) It is hardly possible to conceive a plainer statement of the *simultaneousness* of the resurrection of both classes, the good and the wicked. "The voice" which is here said to raise the dead is the same as that referred to by Paul in 1 Cor. 15: 51, 52 and 1 Thess. 4: 16. When Jesus told Martha that her brother should rise again, she said unto him, "I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day." Jesus then said, "I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth on me, though he die, yet shall he live; and whosoever liveth and believeth on me shall never die." (John 11: 24-26.) Here is a clear reference to the final summons of the personal resurrection and judgment. The aspiration of Paul was, "If by any means I may attain unto the resurrection from the dead." (Phil. 3: 11.) Paul anticipated a marvelous transformation. "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 his glory, according to the working whereby he is able even to subject all things unto himself." (Phil. 3: 20, 21.) The Bible clearly teaches that the righteous and the wicked will be raised from the dead at the coming of Christ. There will not be two resurrections, but one simultaneous resurrection of the just and the wicked; the separation will take place at the final judgment. (Matt. 25: 31-46.)

The second advent of our Lord is connected with the judgment. "Inasmuch as it is appointed unto men once to die, and after this cometh judgment." (Heb. 9: 27.) Men must appear before God in judgment. "Inasmuch as he hath appointed a day in which he will judge the world in righteousness by the 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.) After the resurrection comes the judgment. "When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the angels with him,

then shall he sit on the throne of his glory: and before him shall be gathered all the nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as the shepherd separateth the sheep from the goats." (Matt. 25: 31, 32.) The destiny of each class is clearly expressed when he says, "These shall go away into eternal punishment: but the righteous into eternal life." (Verse 46.) The judgment includes all kindreds and tongues on the face of the earth. "He will judge the world in righteousness." (Ps. 9: 8.) The whole human family will have passed on it eternal judgment by the judicial authority of Christ when he comes at the end of the world. (2 Cor. 5: 10; Rom. 14: 10-12.) The secret things shall be exposed "in the day when God shall judge the secrets of men, according to my gospel, by Jesus Christ." (Rom. 2: 16.) Jesus is further described as opening all that is obscure in human life at the judgment: "Wherefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and make manifest the counsels of the hearts; and then shall each man have his praise from God." (1 Cor. 4: 5.) It is before Christ at the judgment that we are to strive to appear "unreprovable in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 1: 8; Phil. 1: 10; 1 Thess. 5: 23; 1 Tim. 6: 13-15), and in whose presence, if we are faithful, we "may have whereof to glory in the day of Christ" (Phil. 2: 16). We are to wait for God's Son from heaven, "whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus, who delivereth us from the wrath to come." (1 Thess. 1: 10.) It is he who is to establish our "hearts unblamable in holiness before our God and Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus," (1 Thess. 3: 13.) The blessings of men in the future are made to depend on their earthly attitude toward Christ who is coming to judge all. "Whosoever shall be ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of man also shall be ashamed of him, when he cometh in the glory of his Father." (Mark 8: 38; Luke 9: 26.) To stand unabashed in his presence is a strong incentive to faithfulness; "and now, my little children, abide in him; that, if he shall be manifested, we may have boldness, and not be ashamed before him at his coming." (1 John 2: 28.)

The climax of the second advent of Christ is to finish the exercise of his royal authority, with a proper reward to his faithful servants and a righteous condemnation to

the wicked. His enemies shall be mute in their own defense, though they mourn when he comes to judgment. (Matt. 24: 30; Rev. 1: 7.) "Then cometh the end, when he shall deliver up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have abolished all rule and all authority and power. For he must reign, till he hath put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy that shall be abolished is death." (1 Cor. 15: 24-26.) With the abolition of death, life in its highest possibilities will move on forever, and hence eternal life enjoyed. Into this climax of human redemption the righteous shall enter with joy. "But thanks be to God, who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Wherefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labor is not vain in the Lord." (1 Cor. 15: 57, 58.)

Time of Christ's Second Coming

When will Christ come again? Is his coming "imminent"? Many speculations prevail in attempts to answer these questions. "Time fixing," "date setting," "almanac making," "prophetic perspectives," "making schedules," and "arranging schemes" all belong to the field of "speculation" with respect to the time of Christ's second coming. To fix a definite date for Christ's second coming is to go beyond scriptural authority; to say that he *will* or *will not* come at a certain time is to make assertion without any scriptural authority. No one can truthfully say when Christ will or will not come. Only clear, definite scriptures need to be adduced in answer to the above questions; anything else may be placed in the field of "speculation" or "theory" or "unwarranted inference." Jesus said, "But of that day and hour knoweth no one, not even the angels of heaven, neither the Son, but the Father only." (Matt. 24: 36.) "But of that day or that hour knoweth no one, not even the angels in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father." (Mark 13: 32.) While Jesus was on earth, God had not revealed to him the time when his second advent would occur. Whether God has revealed it to him since he ascended to the Father we do not know; there is not any statement in the New Testament that reveals this fact; hence we dismiss that point from our study and investigation. The angels in heaven

did not know then the time of Jesus' second advent; if it has been revealed to the angels since then, we have no evidence of it; again, no man then knew, and if God has revealed it to any man since Jesus was on earth, the scriptures are silent upon that point. So far as God's revelation to man is concerned, Christ, the angels in heaven, and no man on earth know when the second coming of Christ will be. This was a profound and silent secret that belonged only to God at the time the New Testament was written and it is presumptuous folly on the part of any man to make out any prophetic program as to the time of the second coming of Christ.

Is the coming of Christ "imminent"? By "imminence" is meant liable to take place "at any moment." There has been much "speculation" and "theorizing" with regard to "the imminence of Christ's coming." The word "imminent" conveys the idea that the second coming of Christ is actually close at hand and that it is likely to occur "at any moment"; that it is like "the balancing rock"; it is "as if a rock were delicately poised; it might remain standing for years, or it might fall within a few hours, or at any moment"; so it is with the coming of Christ, we are told. The word "imminent" is not in the Bible, neither is any synonym of it found in the New Testament; hence no one should dogmatically affirm that "the coming of Christ is imminent." Jesus said, "Take ye heed, watch and pray: for ye know not when the time is. It is as when a man, sojourning in another country, having left his house, and given authority to his servants, to each one his work, commanded also the porter to watch. Watch therefore: for ye know not when the lord of the house cometh, whether at even, or at midnight, or at cockcrowing, or in the morning; lest coming suddenly he find you sleeping. And what I say unto you I say unto all, Watch." (Mark 13: 33-37.) Jesus emphasizes the fact that no one knows, and that his coming is sudden, and that all should watch; but there is not in this scripture the idea of "imminence."

The New Testament teaches *now* just what it taught *when* it was written. No one will deny this fact. If the New Testament did not teach that "the coming of Christ was imminent" *when it was written*, it does not teach *now* that "his coming is imminent." There is no escape from the force of this reasoning. If the New Testament taught *when it was written* that there were *certain things* which

must occur *before Christ comes*, then it did not teach that "his coming was imminent." The coming of Christ could not be "imminent" so long as there was something that had to occur *before he came*. If anything between his ascension to heaven and his return on his second advent had to occur then his coming could not be *imminent until those things had occurred*. Again, if the coming of Christ *then* was "imminent," the things which must occur before his coming would be *more imminent* since they must occur before Christ comes. Never mind now whether those things have occurred since the New Testament was written; the New Testament teaches now just what it taught when it was written and no one can affirm that the New Testament teaches today that "the coming of Christ is imminent." All the prophecies and predictions of his second coming must be fulfilled *before* he comes, and his second coming cannot be "imminent" till they are fulfilled.

The New Testament teaches clearly and emphatically *that there were some things which must occur before Christ comes again*. It teaches that the heaven should receive and retain Christ until certain things should occur. "Whom the heaven must receive until the times of restoration of all things, whereof God spake by the mouth of his holy prophets that have been from of old." (Acts 3: 21.) It does not matter now what "the times of restoration" mean, whether this period of time has occurred, neither when it will occur; the heavens must receive Christ until all of those things have occurred.

While Christ was on earth, after his resurrection, and just before his ascension, he told Peter the manner of death that he should die. (John 21: 19.) That is Peter's death is distinctly foretold, even to its manner, and therefore Christ would not come during the lifetime of Peter—Peter must live his life, do the work of an apostle, before Christ comes. Again Paul was told that he should see Rome and bear witness of Christ there. It had been revealed to Paul in a vision (Acts 23: 11) that he should bear witness for Christ in Rome; hence the coming of Christ would not occur until after Paul had seen Rome. Again when Paul wrote his second letter to Timothy he understood that he would soon die. (2 Tim. 4: 7.) Christ was not to return during the lifetime of Paul; hence his coming was not "imminent" to Peter and Paul. Again Luke records certain things that must occur before Christ

comes. (Luke 21: 25-28.) And after these things had occurred Jesus said, "And then shall they see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory." We are also taught that Jerusalem and the temple must be destroyed before Christ comes. Jesus foretells wars, commotions among the nations, Jerusalem's capture, and the destruction of the temple, the persecution of Christians, cosmic convulsions, unparalleled tribulation and suffering before his second coming. (See Matt. 24: 25; Mark 13; Luke 21,)

When Jesus gave the commission, he contemplated that certain things would take place before he would return. He said, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to the whole creation." (Mark 16: 15.) Again he said to his apostles that they should "be my witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judæa and Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth." (Acts 1: 8.) The apostles were not to begin this work until the Holy Spirit came on the day of Pentecost. The Holy Spirit did not come until after Jesus ascended to the Father. Jesus was in heaven at the right hand of God when the apostles began their work under the commission; it would take some time to spread the gospel "to the whole creation" "and unto the uttermost part of the earth," yet this was what the disciples were commanded to do. Hence between the ascension of Jesus and his second coming the gospel must be preached "to the whole creation," and since it would take time to do this, Jesus would not return until after it was done; therefore his coming was not "imminent" at the time the commission was given, neither could it have been "imminent" when the apostles began preaching the gospel. They could not and did not preach that "the coming of Christ was imminent"; yet they preached a full gospel. Therefore the full gospel did not include "the imminent coming of Christ."

It is not conceivable that all nations should be discipled, baptized and brought under the discipline of Christ's law and developed into full-grown men and women in the Lord within a moment's time; yet this is what the teaching of the New Testament required. The parables regarding the gospel kingdom refute such an idea. "The field," which was to be sown both with tares and with wheat, is "the world"; that is to say, a world-wide kingdom is to be formed, embracing the genuine and the false-hearted subjects of Christ under one visible name; both are to "grow

together until the harvest"; and the harvest is "the end of the world." (Matt. 13: 24-30, 36-43.) It matters not whether "world" here be translated "age," it represents a time which was in the future. The same truth is taught in the parable of the net cast into the sea, that gathered of every kind, and the same period is fixed for the severance of the good from the bad—"the end of the world." (Matt. 13: 47-50.) The parable of the mustard seed (Matt. 13: 31, 32) and also that of the leaven hold forth the same idea (Matt. 13: 33); there is a progressive advancement like a tree springing from the least of seeds and like leaven working its way through the mass of human society. All this takes time and must occur before Christ comes again. The New Testament implies that there must be time for the growth, development, and mission of the kingdom or church on earth *before* Christ comes again; these facts forever preclude the idea of "the imminent coming of Christ." The gospel must have been given to all generations, baptism and the Lord's Supper must have served their full and complete purpose, the intercession of Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit will have ceased, and the church must have completed its mission on earth before Christ comes again. Never mind now whether any or all of these things have been done or fulfilled; never mind whether all of these things have been completed and that we are nearer the second coming of Christ than ever before, and never mind that some prophecy may have been fulfilled, they had not been when the New Testament was written and *since the New Testament teaches now just what it taught when it was written, the New Testament does not now teach the imminent coming of Christ.*

Some of the church at Thessalonica believed in "the imminent coming of Christ," when Paul wrote his second letter to the church there, but he corrected their misunderstanding and instructed them that the coming of Christ was *not imminent*. He said, "Now we beseech you, brethren, touching the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and our gathering together unto him; to the end that ye be not quickly shaken from your mind, nor yet be troubled, either by spirit, or by word, or by epistle as from us, as that the day of the Lord is just at hand; let no man beguile you in any wise: for it will not be, except the falling away come first, and the man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition, he that opposeth and exalteth himself against

all that is called God or that is worshipped; so that he sitteth in the temple of God, setting himself forth as God. Remember ye not, that, when I was yet with you, I told you these things? And now ye know that which restraineth, to the end that he may be revealed in his own season. For the mystery of lawlessness doth already work: only there is one that restraineth now, until he be taken out of the way. And then shall be revealed the lawless one, whom the Lord Jesus shall slay with the breath of his mouth, and bring to nought by the manifestation of his coming; even he, whose coming is according to the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders. (2 Thess. 2: 1-9.) Paul sets these Christians right about the second coming of Christ. He assures them that some things must precede that day, namely, "the falling away," or apostasy, and the appearing of a powerful adversary whom he calls "the man of sin," and the scribes as "the son of perdition." Neither the apostasy nor the man of sin was present at the time Paul wrote; but there was the "mystery of lawlessness" already at work at the time, and although a certain restraint held it in check, nevertheless when the check was removed it would at once precipitate the apostasy, and it would issue in the advent of "the man of sin," and he should be brought to nought by the personal coming of Jesus Christ. Here Paul expressly implies that a long and complicated series of events had to be developed before Christ would come. At the very time when Paul was writing this and announcing it for the very purpose of crushing the expectation of an "imminent coming of Christ," we must know that he did not mean for any of them to expect Christ "at any moment." How could any of the Christians at Thessalonica believe that the coming of Christ was "imminent" when all these things must first come to pass, and as yet, not one of them had occurred? Some of the Christians at Thessalonica seem to have misunderstood Paul's language in his first letter and seem to have represented him as believing in "the imminent coming of Christ." This occasioned the writing of the second epistle to the church in which Paul so clearly teaches that "the coming of Christ was not imminent."

Paul warns the church at Thessalonica that it should not be troubled about the coming of Christ "as that the day of the Lord is just at hand," "for it will not be, except the falling away come first, and the man of sin be re-

vealed." Never mind now what "the falling away" may mean nor what "the man of sin" may be; the coming of Christ will not be until at least these two things occur. The great apostasy must first occur, and then "the man of sin" must be developed. Never mind whether these two things have occurred since Paul wrote this; they had not occurred when Paul wrote this letter, but had to occur before Christ came. So Paul did not teach "the imminent coming of Christ" *then*, and since his language teaches *now* just what it taught *then*, it does not teach now "the imminent coming of Christ." All we know about the second coming of Christ is taught in the Bible, and if the Bible does not teach that the second coming of Christ is imminent, no one has authority to teach it; and yet we can say with John, "he who testifieth these things saith, Yea: I come quickly. Amen: come, Lord Jesus." (Rev. 22: 20.)

"The Millennium"

Nowhere in the New Testament do we find this word "millennium." It is derived from the Latin, "mille," a thousand, and "annus," years, and literally means a thousand years. Those who believe in the theory of "a millennium" have arranged in the program of Christ's second coming a period of time of exactly one thousand years that they call the "millennium." They mean by this that Christ will return to earth and assume a personal, visible, and bodily reign before any period which can be called "the millennium" has been inaugurated. There are two attitudes with respect to it. One view is that Christ will return in person before "the millennium" begins; these are called "premillennialists." The other view is that Christ will not return until the close of "the millennium"; they are called "postmillennialists." The second coming of Christ marks the beginning of "the millennium" with the "premillennialists" and the close of "the millennium" for the "postmillennialists." On the supposition that there is a definite time of a thousand years when Christ will reign in Jerusalem over all Israel, Christ must come *before* "the millennium" or *during* "the millennium," or *after* "the millennium." The New Testament does not teach anything about a definite period, separated from the rest of human history by strictly defined boundaries, as "millenarians" have arranged in their scheme.

There is but one scripture upon which the "pre-millenarians" base their theory of the "millennium." No interpretation of this passage is required. We let it speak for itself. "And I saw an angel coming down out of heaven, having the key of the abyss and a great chain in his hand. And he laid hold on the dragon, the old serpent, which is the Devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years, and cast him into the abyss, and shut it, and sealed it over him, that he should deceive the nations no more, until the thousand years should be finished: After this he must be loosed for a little time. And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them: and I saw the souls of them that had been beheaded for the testimony of Jesus, and for the word of God, and such as worshipped not the beast, neither his image, and received not the mark upon their forehead and upon their hand; and they lived, and reigned with Christ a thousand years. The rest of the dead lived not until the thousand years should be finished. This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: over these the second death hath no power; but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years. And when the thousand years are finished, Satan shall be loosed out of his prison, and shall come forth to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to the war: the number of whom is as the sand of the sea. And they went up over the breadth of the earth, and compassed the camp of the saints about, and the beloved city: and fire came down out of heaven, and devoured them. And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where are also the beast and the false prophet; and they shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever." (Rev. 20: 1-10.)

This is the single passage of scripture upon which the "millennium theory" is based. In order to make it fit the theory "the thousand years" must be taken literally. Is it not strange that there is *only one passage of scripture in the New Testament*, and *that one passage in Revelation*, the book that abounds in figurative language, symbolical terms and allegorical expressions? All other fundamental doctrines of the New Testament are repeatedly taught in plain and simple language, but "the millennium," if there be such a doctrine, is taught only in figurative language.

All other fundamental doctrines of the New Testament are taught in many books of the New Testament; some of them are taught in every book of the New Testament; but "the millennium," if there be such a doctrine, is taught in *only Revelation*, which is highly figurative. Furthermore it is taught in highly figurative terms.

By no fair interpretation of this scripture can it be made to support the theory of "the millennium." All "millenarians" and "premillennialists" insist that "the thousand years" should be taken literally, yet the entire passage abounds in figures and symbols. It contains such figures and symbols as "the abyss," "sealed it over," "a great chain in his hand," "thrones," "the souls of them that had been beheaded," "worshipped not the beast," "mark upon their forehead and upon their hand," "second death," "thousand years," "loosed out of his prison," "the four corners of the earth," "Gog and Magog," "breadth of the earth," "the camp of the saints," "the beloved city," "fire came down out of heaven," "cast into the lake of fire and brimstone," "the beast and the false prophet." Here are eighteen figures and symbols in this scripture. If one of these expressions is to be taken literally, why not all of them? Why take only one, "a thousand years," and make it literal but not the other seventeen expressions? Why not assign a season for giving one a literal meaning and the others a figurative? Or why not give all of them a literal meaning? Such handling of the scripture is unfair. Why not seek a literal interpretation for "the chain," "the key," as well as the "thousand years"? Peter said, "One day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day." (2 Pet. 3: 8.) The number, "thousand years," is the basis for "the millennium." John uses numbers frequently as symbols; he uses "three," "four," "seven," and "twelve"; these all have a symbolic meaning in Revelation; why not conclude that "the thousand years" has a symbolic meaning? John does not use numbers as exact measures of time and space; they symbolize qualities, characteristics, conditions, and such like.

Rev. 20: 1-10, even if taken literally for the thousand years, does not support the theory of "the millennium"; it does not state *where* the saints are to reign; "premillennialists" assert that it is on the earth; the text simple declares that it is "with Christ," but it does not state that *Christ is on the earth*. This text lacks the

essential points necessary to support the theory of the "millennium." In the first place, there is no resurrection "of bodies" in this passage at all; it was only "the souls" that John saw in this vision. In the next place it refers only to the souls "of them that had been beheaded for the testimony of Jesus, and for the word of God, and such as worshipped not the beast, neither his image, and received not the mark upon their forehead and upon their hand," that is, the martyrs for Christ. There is no resurrection of all the saints in their bodies in this passage, and yet this is what the "premillennialists" claim for it. In the third place there is "no coming of Christ," second or otherwise, mentioned in the passage. This scripture simply does not teach the theory of "the millennium" and it is the only proof that the "premillennialists" have for it.

In order for this scripture to fit the theory of the "premillennialists" only one of the eighteen expressions of a highly figurative and symbolic passage must be taken *literally*, and all the seventeen others taken *symbolically*. There is no place in the New Testament for the modern premillennial theory of a thousand years' personal reign of Christ on earth. When Christ comes the second time the church will have absolutely fulfilled its mission on earth; all the scriptures pertaining to the second coming of Christ will have been fulfilled; baptism and the Lord's Supper will have served their purpose; the intercession of Christ for his saints and the work of the Holy Spirit will have ceased; the entire family of God will be made alive at his second coming; all the dead, both great and small, good and evil, will be raised from the dead or "made alive" at his coming; the righteous and the wicked will be judged together and each class will have passed upon it the righteous judgment of God; the righteous will pass into the eternal and supernal bliss of heaven, and the wicked will be cast away into eternal condemnation. (Matt. 25: 46.)

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