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401 - The Second Coming Of Christ

1. Introduction

There's a lot of confusion about when Christ will return. Some ideas about the second coming are complex involving global events, multiple stages, a variety of signs and the impact this will have on believers. As with other subjects addressed by inspired scripture, details concerning Christ's return are numerous enough to provide a clear picture of when and how it will occur and the order of events that will take place when the Lord returns.

2. Back to basics

As I stated in the last lesson, the best way to understand something is to go to the source and gather the facts. I mentioned that law enforcement trained to spot counterfeit currency don't study the counterfeits, they study the real thing until they know it intimately. The same is true with the scriptures. There are thousands of ideas and variants of those ideas on countless biblical subjects, many of which are in error. We can't examine every error, misinterpretation or false doctrine because there are just too many of them. But we can study the Bible. We can become so familiar with it's contents and what they mean that when someone tries to present something that's wrong, we'll recognize it and be able to discuss the subject.

When it comes to Bible study there are too many who allow others to think for them. Doctrines and ideas skillfully presented by an eloquent teacher or speaker will be adopted because they sound good, appear to make sense and the speaker usually has a good command of the ideas they're advocating. Once these ideas are planted, students then follow the recommended path to confirm the ideas presented. In other words people accept a conclusion and then turn to the scriptures to find the words a teacher has used which for all intents and purposes appears to confirm what they've been told. Makes sense, right? No it doesn't. Conclusions should never be reached without gathering the factual evidence for ourselves and examining it critically to see if the things taught fit the evidence gathered.

There are a number of topics related to understanding the Bible that fall into this category. One is the process of being saved or obeying the Gospel. Another is the work and worship of the church etc. The list is pretty long. The second coming of Christ is an area that receives a lot of attention, has spawned books, movies and video games. It's become a focal point for misinterpretation and misapplication in many areas. The only way to clear up the confusion is to go back to the book itself and see what it says.

In this lesson I'm going to cover

- a. Statements describing the second coming
- b. Paul's sequence of events that will occur

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c. Conclusions based on the factual evidence we've examined

Let's take a look at each of these

3. Statements describing the second coming

The first thing that comes to mind whenever the subject of the second coming is discussed is - when will it happen? The scriptures answer that question and gives us information not only about when but whether we can identify the timing of the end.

First of all let's take the when off the table and get an answer. Christ provides that information in a conversation he has with his disciples who asked about that very subject. In response to their question Christ informs them, "***But of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only.***" (Matt 24.36). We need to let that sink in for a second. Christ clearly indicates that only God himself knows when Christ will be sent back. Now I have to say that this verse is referring to the second coming but is part of a complex prophecy recorded in **Matthew 24**. I'll deal with that chapter in an upcoming lesson, but for now the when is clearly unknown. God didn't tell Christ. The angels don't know and if heavenly beings, including the son of God himself don't know, there's no way you or I will ever be able to figure it out. And that leads us to statements about signs that will alert us to the Lord's imminent return.

Christ answers this as well. "***Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come.***" (Matt 24.42). Take note of this. You don't know. I can't know. Christ doesn't know. The angels don't know. Only God knows and Christ reinforces the fact that we're not going to figure it out.

Peter confirms this in his writings describing the nature of the second coming. "***But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night...***" (2 Pet 3.10). Christ made a similar statement. "***But know this, that if the goodman of the house had known in what watch the thief would come, he would have watched, and would not have suffered his house to be broken up. Therefore be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh.***" (Matt 24.43-44). Once more we have to pay attention to the details.

Christ and Peter both compare the second coming to an intrusion by a thief. Criminals robbing a home don't provide advanced warning of what they intend to do. The element of surprise is their advantage and because of that we remain unprepared if we're not vigilant. Christ goes on to describe the conditions that further highlight the unexpected and unforeseen nature of the second coming.

Christ states, "***But as the days of Noe were, so shall also the coming of the Son of man***

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be. For as in the days that were before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark, And knew not until the flood came, and took them all away; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be.” (Matt 24.37-39). The parallel Christ draws here is deliberate and significant. The world in the time of Noah had become consumed with evil. Violence filled the Earth and men were taking wives of all they desired as described in **Genesis 6**. God spoke to Noah and instructed him to build an ark to preserve his family from the coming destruction. The narrative in the book of Genesis doesn't reveal that anyone was concerned about spiritual things and for that were completely taken off guard when the flood began. For the people of the time the beginning of destruction began as any other day.

Another aspect of the second coming is the speed at which things will take place. In some interpretations there are multiple events, the raising of armies and other things all of which point to the end. Christ once more tells us what the second coming will be like. *“For as the lightning cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be.” (Matt 24.27).* We now have three elements at work. The first is that no one except God knows when it will happen. It will not be expected. It will take place rapidly - in the span of a flash of lightning.

Christ reinforces the sudden, rapid and unexpected nature of the second coming as he concludes his remarks to the disciples. *“Therefore be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh.” (Matt 24.44).* Once more the unexpected, and unpredictable nature of the second coming is reinforced.

There are other aspects of the second coming that are revealed as well. Christ describes these as he answers his disciples questions. *“And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And he shall send 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 24.30-31).* This aspect of the second coming is also addressed by Paul in his letter to the Thessalonians who were dealing with false teaching concerning the second coming.

Paul writes, *“And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ...” (2 Thess 1.7-8).* This provides an aspect of judgment which also takes place at the time of the second coming. Christ has told us that the angels will be with him at his return, they will gather the elect and take them to Christ as Paul also details. He writes, *“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*

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shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord.” (1 Thess 4.16-17).

That’s a lot of information, and from these passages we have a lot that’s taking place in the span of a flash of lightning across the sky. To help us sort this out we can turn to Paul’s letter to the Corinthians where he describes the second coming in a sequential sense. That will aid us in constructing an order of events and synchronize them with other passages that deal with the second coming.

4. Paul’s sequence of events that will occur

The church at Corinth had a lot of problems that Paul addresses in his two epistles to them. One of the things that had to be addressed were questions about Christ’s resurrection and subsequently that of Christians. Paul addresses this in detail and in that discussion gives us a framework that we can use to organize a sequence that will take place at the Lord’s return.

Paul makes the case for the validity of the resurrection. He answers questions about the type of body we’ll have in the resurrection and he gives a brief statement about the sequence of events. ***“Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.” (1 Cor 15.51-52).*** This harmonizes with Christ’s statements about the angels gathering the elect, those who are saved, and bringing them to be with Christ as we read a moment ago.

The judgment takes place and then Christ will present the church to his Father consisting of the saved from Earth of all time. Paul describes the second coming and resurrection, writing, ***“Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming. Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power. For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death. For he hath put all things under his feet. But when he saith all things are put under him, it is manifest that he is excepted, which did put all things under him. And when all things shall be subdued unto him, then shall the Son also himself be subject unto him that put all things under him, that God may be all in all.” (1 Cor 15.24-28).*** Let’s break this down a bit so we understand the sequence.

Christ is the first of those resurrected by God. At the last day the faithful who have passed will be raised and gathered along with those who are alive at the time of Christ’s return. The judgment takes place, then Christ presents the saved to his father and resumes his place of subjection to God the father. From these passages we can construct a sequence of events.

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- a. The trump of God will sound marking the end
- b. Christ appears in the heavens with his angels
- c. The faithful dead rise first and are gathered
- d. Those faithful who are alive are gathered
- e. The saved are joined with Christ - in the air
- f. Christ presents the saved to God
- g. Christ takes his place being subject to God

This is fairly complete now that we have both Christ's statements and Paul's clarification of events. Peter supplies us with the final event that will happen at the time Christ returns. "***But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up.***" (2 Pet 3.10). The final action taking place when Christ returns is the destruction of the physical universe. With these passages we can now draw some conclusions about the second coming based on the biblical facts presented.

5. Conclusions based on the factual evidence we've examined

Based on the review of the passages I've cited we can reconstruct the main points that have been revealed about the second coming.

- a. Only God knows when this will happen
- b. There won't be any sign or warning
- c. The second coming will take place like a thief in the night
- d. People will be just as unsuspecting as those were at the time of the flood
- e. The trump of God will sound
- f. Christ will be revealed in the clouds with his angels
- g. The dead in Christ will rise first and be gathered
- h. Those who remain alive will then be gathered to Christ
- I. The judgment takes place
- j. The physical universe is destroyed
- k. Christ presents the saved to God
- l. Christ assumes his place with the Father & is subject to God
- m. The second coming occurs as quickly as a lightning flash or blink of an eye

The statements about the second coming and events that will take place at that time are clear. I have to note here that whenever God reveals something clearly he doesn't obscure it later with new prophecies. We have to be careful to make sure we're understanding the context of statements in the scriptures and to preserve that context. Confusion about the second coming isn't generated by the clear statements made, it arises from misunderstanding passages in the New Testament that are thought to be dealing with the second coming.

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6. Next

Now that we have a framework to understand the second coming we can take a closer look at one of the chapters cited as a source text for ideas about the end times and Christ's return. We'll take **An Overview Of Matthew 24** and identify the challenges we face when trying to understand this chapter.