

What Jesus Said About His Second Coming

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Introduction

Someone has suggested the following simple outline of the Bible:

1. Jesus is coming (Gen.–Mal.)
2. Jesus has come (Mat.–John)
3. Jesus is coming again (Acts–Rev.)

While there is an element of truth in the foregoing analysis, the Bible student immediately recognizes that the doctrine of the Second Coming of Christ is not confined to Acts through Revelation. As we will see in the course of our study, it is also a major subject in the Gospel accounts from the Lord's own lips.

The Second Coming of Christ is one of the most regularly appearing themes of the New Testament, beginning with the statements of Jesus Himself. One will do well to remember that the teaching of the inspired writers of the New Testament on this subject (as on all others) is as much the "doctrine of Christ" as is the teaching He did personally. There are two extremes of reaction to the doctrine of the Second Coming:

1. Unbelief and denial on the part of humanists, atheists, agnostics, and pagans
2. Wild speculation about the when, the what, and the why of Jesus' coming.

Much of the dispensational premillennial theological system (it is far more than merely a "doctrine") revolves around gross misconceptions relating to the Second Coming.

Each of the Gospel accounts records various statements Jesus made concerning His return. When one reads His words of comfort to the apostles, there can be no doubt that He taught the fact of His return:

"Let not your heart be troubled: believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions; 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 come again, and will receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also" (John 14:1-3).¹

However, as we shall see, He taught far more than merely the fact of His return. He also taught several details about occurrences that relate to that grand event.

What Will Jesus Find in Mankind at His Coming?

When He Comes, Everyone Will Be Surprised

Almost ever since He began promising His return, pseudo prophets and time guessers who have predicted a certain time for the Second Coming. Some lying scribe, apparently

pretending to be Paul, wrote to the church in Thessalonica, declaring the eminent coming of the Lord:

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 (2 The. 2:1-3).

Paul wasted no time denying that he wrote the letter and correcting the false teaching it contained.

Many in more recent times have ventured to predict the time of the Lord's coming, all of whom have been left with theological egg all over their faces. William Miller, upon whose teachings the Seventh Day Adventist sect is built, first predicted the Lord's second "advent" (hence the "Adventist" name) in 1843. He so successfully deceived his followers that they gave their possessions away, donned white robes, and took to the hills to meet the Lord when He came. When his predictions failed, Miller said he missed his date by one year, so they did the same thing a year later with the same sorry result. Charles Taze Russell, founder of the Jehovah's Witness cult, issued more than one such prediction. He finally sought to cover his deceptive tracks by saying that the Lord came "secretly" only to a few in 1914.

Over the past century, almost every war, international skirmish, volcano eruption, and earthquake has provoked a new round of speculations that the coming of Christ is imminent. More recently, men such as Hal Lindsey, John Walvoord, and Tim LaHaye have made fortunes from their books and other materials that appeal to human curiosity relating to this subject and that take advantage of general Biblical illiteracy. LaHaye has especially scored big with his series of Left Behind books and other media.

They all make the same fatal mistake of applying the signs that Jesus gave for the destruction of Jerusalem (Mat. 24:4-35) to His return.² All such folk would do very well to attend carefully to the words with which the Lord began this section of Scripture: "Take heed that no man lead you astray.... And many false prophets shall arise, and shall lead many astray" (vv. 4, 11). For failure to do so, multiplied millions – perhaps 95% of Protestants – have been led astray concerning the Second Coming of the Lord.

Matthew 24 (with parallels in Mark 13 and Luke 21) begins with unnamed disciples marveling over the majesty of Herod's temple (v. 1). Jesus apparently shocked them by stating that it would someday be utterly leveled (v. 2). Mark tells us that they had crossed Kidron and

were gazing across the valley at the Temple from the Mount of Olives. In the company of Peter, James, John, and Andrew, one of them asked him for details about His startling statement (13:3). It is apparent that they identified any event sufficiently cataclysmic to level the Temple with His return and the end of the world:

And as he sat on the mount of Olives, the disciples came unto him privately, saying, Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world? (Mat. 24:3b).

However, in His answers, Jesus clearly separated their **three** questions into **two** separate issues: (1) the destruction of the temple (i.e., Jerusalem) and (2) His return and the end of the world, answering them in turn. He immediately proceeded to answer their first question by (1) telling them some things that would occur before Jerusalem's fall (vv. 5–14) and then (2) giving them the one sign of its impending doom—"the abomination of desolation...standing in the holy place" (v. 15; Luke is not cryptic, but literal in his description: "Jerusalem compassed with armies" [21:20]). Upon seeing this development, they were to cease what they were doing, abandon all property, and flee to the mountains for their lives from the conflagration about to be visited upon the city (Mat. 24:16–28). (Premillennialists blithely apply this to the Second Coming, conveniently ignoring the fact that it will be futile to attempt to flee or seek shelter anywhere when the Lord returns.)

The judgment upon Jerusalem and corrupt Judaism would be (and was) so awful and complete that the Lord likened it unto "the coming of the Son of man" (v. 27). He further described the ensuing destruction in apocalyptic terms used elsewhere by inspired writers to relate the utter overthrow of God's enemies (vv. 29–31; cf. Isa. 13:6–10; Eze. 32:7–8). While this was a "coming" of the Lord (vv. 27, 30, 33), it was not **the** Second Coming. It was rather a "coming" in judgment upon fleshly Israel that would occur in the lifetime of those to whom He spoke: "Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass away, till all these things be accomplished" (Mat. 24:34). If those terrible events have not yet occurred (as adamantly argued by the dispensational speculators), then Jesus was a false prophet. They most certainly occurred in A.D. 70 when the four Roman Legions under General Titus overwhelmed Jerusalem, utterly razed it, slew tens of thousands of its residents, and took the remainder of them into slavery.

After discussing the signs by which His disciples might be able to recognize the impending doom of Jerusalem, Jesus then turned to the second issue of their questions—His Second Coming and the end of the world, which discussion runs from Matthew 24:36 through 25:46. Verse 36 is the "transition verse" by which the Lord changes the subject: "But of **that** day

and hour **knoweth no one**, not even the angels of heaven, neither the Son, but the Father only” (emph. DM).

With these words He turns to an obviously different event from that which He had been discussing, which He styles “that day,” the time of which neither man, angel, nor even He Himself knows. He quickly identifies that event and “day” as “the coming of the Son of man” (v. 37; cf. vv. 39, 42, 44, 50; 25:6, 19; 31). Whereas the former event (the destruction of Jerusalem in their lifetimes) could be anticipated and recognized before it occurred because of certain signs, it would not be so with the “day” He is now describing.

He promptly reiterated man’s inability to know the time of His coming: “Watch therefore: for **ye know not on what day your Lord cometh**” (v. 42; emph. DM). He was still not through with His emphasis on man’s utter inability to know the time of His return: “Therefore be ye also ready; for **in an hour that ye think not the Son of man cometh**” (v. 44; emph. DM). The Lord’s repetition seems to almost anticipate man’s stubbornness in refusing to hear what He says. What part of the phrase, *knoweth no one*, relating to His return do people not understand?

Those who predict the time of the Lord’s return and those who believe the predictors are either (1) abysmally ignorant of the Scriptures (in which case they should do some more studying before they pretend to be Bible scholars) or (2) they know what the Bible teaches, but they value their Dispensational Premillennial Theology above the Word of the Son of God.

The work of the time-guessers in their date setting would be downright comedic were it not so tragic in its consequences. They know no more about the time of the Lord’s return than a newborn baby. Only fools would dare continue to proclaim, “We know,” after the Lord so plainly and repeatedly said, “Ye know not.” There are no “signs” by which one can determine when He will return. Rather, it will be “business as usual” in the affairs of men, as it was in the days of Noah before the flood (vv. 37–42). The Lord’s appearance will be at a time when men are not expecting it, as a thief chooses the hour when he is least expected to commit his crime (v. 43). Both Paul (1 The. 5:2–3) and Peter (2 Pet. 3:10) use the same figure in discussing this subject.

When He Comes, Most Will Not Be Ready and Will Mourn

The practical point of our inability to determine the time of Jesus’ return is that we must be ever watchful and ready: “Therefore be ye also ready; for in an hour that ye think not the Son of man cometh” (Mat. 24:44). He immediately tells two parables to enforce the need for

perpetual preparedness. The faithful servant is watchful and ready for the return of his master, while the unfaithful one acts wickedly on the assumption that his master's coming is yet far off (vv. 45-51). The wise virgins prepare for the coming of the bridegroom, whether soon or late, while the foolish ones make only momentary preparation and are not ready when he comes (25:1-13). Jesus was indirectly teaching concerning the lack of readiness for His Second Coming in Matthew 7:13: "Enter ye in by the narrow gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many are they that enter in thereby." When the Lord appears in the clouds (Acts 1:9-11; 1 The. 4:17; Rev. 1:7a), most will not be prepared because they will not have entered through the "narrow gate" of obedience to the Truth (John 8:32). All such will mourn at their hopeless condition and eternal destiny of destruction (Rev. 1:7b).

Infidels who denied and agnostics who doubted His existence will suddenly (but to no avail) become believers. Then "every tongue shall confess to God" (Rom. 14:11). (Madelyn Murray O'Hair and Carl Sagan were once atheists, but no more.) False teachers will be speechless, and they, with their blind followers, will meet their doom: "Every plant which my heavenly Father planted not, shall be rooted up. Let them alone: they are blind guides. And if the blind guide the blind, both shall fall into a pit" (Mat. 15:13-14).

Those who had intended to prepare by obeying the Gospel will beg for one more minute of time, but in vain. Christ will then render "vengeance to them that know not God, and to them that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus: who shall suffer punishment, even eternal destruction from the face of the Lord and from the glory of his might" (2 The. 1:8-9). Saints who once followed the Lord, but who became too busy or who felt too restricted by His Word to continue will never be bothered by another plea for their return: "Brethren, even if a man be overtaken in any trespass, ye who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; looking to thyself, lest thou also be tempted" (Gal. 6:1).

For all who were not watching and were not prepared for the return of the Lord, Mercy's door will be closed, never to reopen, by Him Who "shutteth and none openeth" (Rev. 3:7).

When He Comes, a Few Will Be Ready and Will Rejoice

By comparison to the "many" above who will be unprepared, few will have prepared by entering the narrow gate and straitened way that leads to life (Mat. 7:14). These will comprise the faithful saints who have listened to the Lord's sober warnings and will be ready and watching because they have lovingly anticipated His appearing (2 Tim. 4:8). Their attitude is

typified by John's words: "Amen: come, Lord Jesus" (Rev. 22:20b). They know what awaits them:

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 The. 4:16-17).

We should carefully heed the words of John in anticipation of the Lord's appearance: "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). When the Lord returns, it will be a time of sweet fulfillment and consummation for those who are prepared. We will at last realize that for which we have hoped and striven. Whatever we have suffered for the Lord's sake will then seem utterly insignificant compared to our glorious reward: "For our light affliction, which is for the moment, worketh for us more and more exceedingly an eternal weight of glory" (2 Cor. 4:17).

What Events Will Transpire at His Coming?

He Will Raise All of the Dead

Jesus taught concerning the resurrection of the dead in very unambiguous terms:

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).

Note the following:

1. **All** the dead will come forth – be resurrected – from the tombs.
2. *All* includes both good and evil.
3. All will come forth when they hear "His voice" – the voice of the Son of God (v. 25).
4. All will be raised when "the hour cometh" – thus all will be raised at the same time.
5. The righteous will be saved eternally, while the unrighteous will be eternally damned.

The Lord does not here specify that which will mark or precipitate the grand resurrection, except by implication: He will call them from their Hadean resting places by His voice, meaning that He will have returned to call them forth as He did His friend Lazarus (11:43-44).

That which the Christ implies in this regard, Paul teaches explicitly in two passages: "For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; then they that are Christ's, at his coming" (1 Cor. 15:22-23).

Note that the Lord was first raised as the “firstfruits” of the resurrected dead, then will follow the resurrection of those who belong to Him at His coming. “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” (1 The. 4:16).³ Clearly, the time of the resurrection will be at the Lord’s descent from Heaven.

Jesus thus teaches that all the dead who have ever lived, good and evil alike, will be raised on the same occasion (John 5:28–29). His inspired apostle tells us unmistakably that the time of the resurrection will be at the Lord’s return.

He Will Prepare All for the Immortal Realm

At the coming of the Lord, the dead will be raised with a spiritual body that is incorruptible (1 Cor. 15:42–44, 52b). But what of those who are alive when the Lord returns? Since “flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God” (v. 50), what are they to do? The Lord will instantaneously transform their corruptible fleshly bodies into incorruptible spiritual bodies at the same moment He raises the saints in their spiritual bodies (vv. 51–53).

While we are naturally curious about this spiritual body the Lord will provide for our Heavenly existence, the Bible does not tell us much about it. Paul tells us that the Savior for Whom we wait will “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” (Phi. 3:20–21). John adds that, while the Lord has not plainly revealed what we shall be like, “We know that, if he shall be manifested, we shall be like him; for we shall see him even as he is” (1 John 3:2). In His resurrected body the Lord was able to ascend to the very throne room of His Father. Our glorious changed immortal bodies, caught up to meet the Lord in the air, will not be susceptible to the disease, decay, injury, aging, pain, and death to which the human body has been subject since Adam and Eve sinned (Rev. 21:4–7; 22:1–5).

He Will Gather All Mankind for the Judgment

Jesus declared that the Father has given the authority of judgment to Him (John 5:22, 27). After telling the two parables on watchfulness and readiness for His return, the Lord next tells the parable of the talents, which emphasizes the Judgment of all men that will occur when the Lord returns (Mat. 25:14–30). He follows this figurative teaching of the Judgment with the description in very literal terms of the Final Judgment that He will execute upon His return (vv. 31–46). According to this description the Judgment will be a time when the righteous and the evil will be given their respective eternal sentences. Millions of husbands and wives, parents

and children, brothers and sisters, and dear friends will be separated on that day, never to be reunited. The Judgment Day will be a time of supreme joy for the saved, but of unutterable dread and terror for the unredeemed.

The Lord referred to the Judgment as “that day” near the close of the Sermon on the Mount:

Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy by thy name, and by thy name cast out demons, and by thy name do many mighty works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity (Mat. 7:21-23).

Paul taught that God has “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). Any attempt to escape the Judgment will be futile:

For we must all be made manifest before the judgment-seat of Christ; that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he hath done, whether it be good or bad (2 Cor. 5:10).

When the Lord returns in Judgment it will be too late to call upon Him for mercy and grace. At His first appearance He “came not to judge the world, but to save the world” (John 12:47). He came at first to provide salvation through the sacrifice of Himself, and as long as He delays His return, men will have an opportunity to be saved. However, at His Second Coming He will come, not to bring salvation to the world, but to judge it. He will not force men to obey Him; He allows men to reject Him and His Word. However, those who do so will be judged by that very Word when He comes: “He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my sayings, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I spake, the same shall judge him in the last day” (John 12:48).

He Will Dissolve the Material Universe

With the eternal sentence of all humanity now passed and sealed, this material universe will have served its purpose in the plan of God. There will no further purpose for it, so the Lord will cause it to exist no longer:

But the day of the Lord will come as a thief; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall be dissolved with fervent heat, and the earth and the works that are therein shall be burned up (2 Pet. 3:10).

The God Who had the power to speak this material system into existence from nothing (Gen. 1:1-31; Psa. 33:6, 9) can, by the same awesome power, speak it from existence into non-existence.

There can be no doubt that “the day of the Lord” refers to the day on which Christ will return. As earlier noted, the Lord used this same figure of the coming of a thief to teach that the time of His coming would be when men were not expecting Him (Mat. 24:43-44). Paul also referred to the Second Coming as “the day of the Lord” and said that it would come “as a thief in the night” (1 The. 4:15-18; 5:1-3).

Peter’s words hardly describe a secret coming, experienced only by the redeemed, as alleged by the “Rapture” advocates. There will be no thousand years between the Lord’s return and the great conflagration Peter described. Thus, there will be no earth on which a millennial kingdom could exist and no time for it, the premillennial adherents notwithstanding. They have it all wrong. He is not coming the second time to establish a political domain upon the earth; He never conceived of such an earthly kingdom.⁴ Rather, He declared:

My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is my kingdom not from hence” (John 18:36).

He established that kingdom at His first coming (Mat. 16:18-19, 28; Mark 9:1). The only kingdom He has is His church, which He will save eternally at His coming (Eph. 5:23-27). Upon His return, He will not **set up** His kingdom, but He will **deliver up** His kingdom (the church that began on Pentecost) to the Father, that it may be at home with Him and the victorious Christ in Heaven forever (1 Cor. 15:24). Nor will there be any “renovation” of the earth into an eternal utopia, as asserted by the Jehovah’s Witnesses.

No one will fail to see, hear, or will otherwise miss the Second Coming! We can scarcely imagine the sound and fury of the galactic upheavals and planetary collisions that will apparently characterize that occasion. The heat will be so intense that the very base elements of which the Lord constructed the universe will melt, dissolve, disintegrate, and be atomized without even any ashes remaining. The combination of all the most spectacular fireworks displays that have ever been built will be but a tiny flicker compared to that Day’s display.

Then, if not before, men will forget their mad strivings for carnal pleasures and for the fulfillment of their forbidden worldly lusts. They will then realize – too late – that the pleasures of sin are but “for a season” (Heb. 11:25). The vanity of the headlong pursuit of mere material

baubles and treasures will then be perfectly evident as they are all rendered forever useless by their utter destruction. Then will all men finally see that the only riches that matter – and that ever mattered – are those treasures one has sent on ahead for deposit in Heaven (Mat. 6:19– 21; 1 Tim. 6:7, 17–19). As all things material disappear, it will at last be apparent, even to the worst reprobate and the most dedicated hedonist, that this world was only a rapidly passing, temporary realm – that the “real world” is that realm of spiritual and eternal verities from which they will be eternally excluded.

Conclusion

When the Lord returns, our hope will not rest in our own righteousness, although He demands righteousness of His people. Peter reasoned with fellow-citizens in the kingdom, as he discussed the Lord’s return:

Seeing that these things are thus all to be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy living and godliness, looking for and earnestly desiring the coming of the day of God, by reason of which the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat? (2 Pet. 3:11–12).

Where one is spiritually when the Christ comes is where one will be at the Judgment and for eternity, with no further opportunity to repent of unbelief, rebellion, and disobedience:

And he saith unto me, Seal not up the words of the prophecy of this book; for the time is at hand. He that is unrighteous, let him do unrighteousness still: and he that is filthy, let him be made filthy still: and he that is righteous, let him do righteousness still: and he that is holy, let him be made holy still. Behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to render to each man according as his work is (Rev. 22:10–12).

Those alone will have hope who have been washed – and have continued to be washed – of sin by the sinless blood of Him Who has come in Judgment:

Blessed are they that wash their robes, that they may have the right to come to the tree of life and may enter in by the gates into the city. Without are the dogs, and the sorcerers, and the fornicators, and the murderers, and the idolaters, and every one that loveth and maketh a lie (Rev. 22:14–15).

The only essential aim of our lives here must be to stand at last on the Lord’s right hand and to hear the welcome words: “Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world” (Mat. 25:34). If we fail at this aim, we will have failed utterly and irreparably, regardless of earthly acclaim, fame, success, and fortune we may have achieved.

Each of us can know with certainty whether or not we are ready for His coming and the Judgment by giving heed to His Word. The Gospel is God’s powerful message of salvation

(Rom. 1:16). It teaches us that our sins are washed away in the blood of Christ (Rev. 1:5) when we are baptized into Christ (Acts 22:16; cf. Rom. 6:3; Gal. 3:27). For this reason, Jesus said: "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that disbelieveth shall be condemned" (Mark 16:16). As long as we live according to His Word as His faithful servants, confessing our momentary lapses into sin, His blood that initially cleansed us continues to do so (1 John 1:7). We will only thus be able to stand before Him at His coming and the Judgment, redeemed by His blood.

The words of Fanny J. Crosby's hymn should be a serious meditation for one and all:

Blessed are those whom the Lord finds watching,
 In His glory they shall share;
 If He shall come at the dawn or midnight,
 Will He find us watching there?
 O can we say, we are ready, brother?
 Ready for the soul's bright home?
 Say will He find you and me still watching,
 Waiting, waiting when the Lord shall come?

Endnotes

1. All Scripture quotations are from the American Standard Version unless otherwise indicated.
2. The second verse of the song, "Jesus Is Coming Soon," by R.E. Winsett, that is in most of the song books we use in worship, contains the following words that reflect this fatal error: "Love of so many cold, losing their home of gold, This in God's Word is told, evils abound. **When these signs come to pass**, nearing the end at last, it will come very fast, trumpets will sound" (emph. DM). We should be as unwilling to **sing** this false doctrine as we are to **preach** or **teach** it.
3. This is perhaps the principal "sugar-stick" passage of those who advocate the "Rapture," a key element of dispensational premillennial dogma. Allegedly, before the "final" Second Coming, the Lord will appear above the earth, will raise all (and only) the righteous dead, whom He will "rapture" up to be with Him in a holding pattern in the sky for seven years. All of this will allegedly be done secretly and silently as far as sinners are concerned. Therefore, when this occurs, there will great confusion, calamity, and mystery on earth as airliners are suddenly and inexplicably without pilots, cars and trucks are driverless, and family members are nowhere to be found. This seven-year period will be one of indescribable "tribulation" on earth, per this doctrine.

At the end of the seven years, the Lord, with those who were with Him in the "Rapture," will supposedly "land" on the earth (on the Mount of Olives). He will then march triumphantly into Jerusalem, restore the old Davidic monarchy and kingdom, reinstate the Law of Moses and the Levitical priesthood and sacrifices, and reign over a political domain for a literal one thousand years. This reign will be followed by the "Battle of Armageddon," after which the unrighteous dead will be raised and the Judgment will occur. LaHaye's *Left Behind* fairy tales are based upon this egregiously erroneous concept of "Rapture."

The “Rapture” doctrine (and its accompaniments) cannot be true if the Bible is true, for at least the following reasons:

- a. Jesus taught one final resurrection of both good and evil **at the same hour**, but the “Rapture” doctrine requires a resurrection of the righteous separate from that of the unrighteous, which allegedly is to occur 1,007 years after the “Rapture” resurrection.
- b. Jesus speaks of only one final, actual, Second Coming, but the “Rapture” doctrine requires a first “Second Coming” (the “Rapture” coming), followed by a second “Second Coming” (the “Kingdom” coming).
- c. Jesus said that, at the resurrection, **all**—good and evil—will **hear His voice**. The resurrection will occur upon His return (1 Cor. 15:22–23; 1 The. 4:16). Therefore, His coming will not be silent or secret, as the “Rapture” theorists advocate. Rather than silent, Paul says that the Lord’s return will be noisy (“with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God,” 1 The. 4:16). John says that it will be universally evident (“every eye shall see him,” Rev. 1:7) rather than secret.
- d. But, some quibble, that if good and evil are to be raised simultaneously, why does Paul not mention the resurrection of the evil (1 Cor. 15:23)? It was not within the purview of his purpose and argument concerning the fact of the resurrection (which some of the Corinthians were denying [v. 12]) to mention every detail about the subject. To mention the resurrection of Christians does not exclude the resurrection of sinners. As previously noted, Jesus specifically placed both good and evil in the one and only bodily resurrection of which the New Testament speaks. Therefore, whenever the resurrection of God’s people is mentioned, the resurrection of those who belong to Satan is thereby implied, whether or not they are specifically mentioned.
- e. What of Paul’s statement that “the dead in Christ shall rise first”? Does not this teach that only Christians will be in the resurrection mentioned in this context and that those outside of Christ will be raised later? The answer hinges on that to which *first* refers. If Paul is saying that those in Christ will be raised first in relation to those **not** in Christ, then the “Rapture” devotees might have a point. However, the context supports no such meaning. Paul used *first*, not in relation to the dead outside of Christ, but in relation to the order of events that would occur at the Lord’s coming. The Thessalonians were concerned that their brethren who died (“them that fall asleep”) would somehow not be able to enter into glory when the Lord returned (v. 13). Rather, Paul taught that when the Lord comes, He will bring those dead saints with Him by raising them from the dead, so that those living at the time of the Second Coming would not precede their dead brethren in joining Christ in glory (vv. 14–15). The Lord would raise them to life first (v. 16), then, both those living when Christ returned and those whom He had raised, would together be caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord and be with Him forever (v. 17). Again, as mentioned above, if both good and evil will be in the same resurrection, as Jesus taught (John 5:28–29), then whenever the resurrection of one class is mentioned, both classes are implied.
- f. In 1 Thessalonians 4:17 we see a further refutation of the “Rapture” nonsense in the very context its adherents like to claim as their own. To fit their doctrine the passage would need to say that the righteous will be caught up in the air to be with the Lord for seven years. Unfortunately for them, Paul says we will be caught up to be with the Lord “forever.” This passage is describing our entering into eternal Heavenly glory at last. It is comparable to Paul’s statement in the context of Jesus’ return and the resurrection, which usher in the end “when he shall deliver up the kingdom to God, even the Father” (1 Cor. 15:24).

- g. There is yet one other passage the Rapturists try to claim for their “separate resurrections” doctrine. Revelation 20:5 refers to some event as “the first resurrection.” First, we should bear in mind that this is one of the most highly figurative chapters in the most highly figurative book in the Bible. As are some nineteen other things mentioned in this chapter (e.g., a key, a great chain, 1,000 years, et al.), this resurrection is likewise figurative. It refers to the “resurrection” of the souls (not bodies) of those who had been martyred for Christ. Apparently in honor of their sacrifice for the Lord, their souls were in Heaven where they “lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years” (i.e., till the end of time and the general resurrection) (v. 4).

Neither these nor any other passage lend any credence or support to a “Rapture.” Neither the word nor the concept is found in the Bible.

4. Premillennialists cannot even get right the location of the Lord at His return. Their system demands that Jesus must come back to the earth in order to set up His Kingdom. However, the New Testament never places the Lord on earth when He comes again. Rather, Paul says that He will “descend from heaven” and instead of coming on down to earth, will take His people up in the clouds to meet Him in the air (1 The. 4:16-17). The *Jesus-on-earth* error relative to the Second Coming is found in verse four of the song, “Living by Faith”: “Our Lord will return to this earth some sweet day, Our troubles will then all be o’er....” Interestingly, W.E. Winsett, the same writer who wrote the premillennial song discussed above, “Jesus Is Coming Soon,” wrote this verse. He is obviously a devotee of the dispensational premillennial system. As with that song, we should also not sing the error in this song.

[**Note:** I wrote this MS for and presented a digest of it orally at the Power Lectures, hosted by the Southaven, MS, Church of Christ, August 9-13, 1998. It was published in the book of the lectures, *The Godhead: A Study of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit*, ed. B.J. Clarke (Southaven, MS: Southaven Church of Christ).]

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