

THE SECOND COMING  
OF  
CHRIST

*“BEHOLD, HE IS  
COMING WITH THE  
CLOUDS, AND EVERY  
EYE WILL SEE  
HIM . . .”*

*by*

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A BRIEF SURVEY OF THE NEW TESTAMENT  
DOCTRINE OF THE  
SECOND COMING OF CHRIST.

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## INTRODUCTION

In The Acts of the Apostles chapter 8, Philip, an evangelist, engaged an Ethiopian in dialogue. The man was of great authority and happened to be the treasurer to the Queen of Ethiopia. He had been up to Jerusalem to worship, and when Philip met him he was reading Isaiah chapter 53. Philip asked him if he understood what he was reading. He answered by saying: “*How can I, except some man should guide me?*” (Acts 8:31). Let it be noted that he was reading from Isaiah, and Philip was able to begin from the same passage and, “*preached unto him Jesus.*” (Acts 8: 35). In this connection, it is worth comparing the content of Luke 24:27, 44, 45. These words were spoken by Jesus, and they leave no doubt that he saw himself as figuring prominently in the Old Testament prophecies.

However, while this latter point is important, let it also be noted that this VIP from Ethiopia needed help in understanding what he was reading. This of course is not unusual because even today a lot of Christians also need help in arriving at a better understanding of the Scriptures. I know I did when I first became a disciple of Jesus Christ. Moreover, such is particularly the case when it comes to the doctrine of the second coming of Christ. One reason for the confusion on this subject can be found in the multiplicity of theories that have been introduced over the centuries. Consequently, many Christian people, including pastors, stay away from it, and will not even discuss it.

I remember a home Bible study class I was teaching in which it was openly admitted by many who were present that they had no knowledge of this subject, and had not so much as heard one sermon on its significance in their lives. Some, who were not totally ignorant, had been put off precisely because they were apparently confused due to the conflicting theories about the subject. There were others who spoke out and who thought themselves to be “IN THE TRUTH,” for they had inadvertently

bought into a novel theory that teaches two future comings of Christ. In actual fact, this would mean that they now had three comings of Christ: (1) His first coming which concerned his earthly ministry and his substitutionary death on the cross, (2) His second coming (so the theory goes), which was to be a sort of special secret coming when he would gather his church together, (usually referred to as “the rapture,”), and (3) His third coming when he would come to establish his kingdom upon the earth. For a number of years I myself held to the tri-coming doctrine. It was what I had been taught, and it was taught to me by sincere godly men.

Some teachers think they have cleared away the possibility of misunderstanding when they qualify their theory of two future comings by saying that there is really only one second coming, but that it takes place in two phases. However, since this theory has a gap of anywhere from three and a half to seven years, between the supposed two phases, it surely must involve two separate comings. Verbal gymnastics can hardly obscure this conclusion.

Incidentally, as just stated, at one time, I held to this theory, for it was what I had been taught. Little did I know that it was a nineteenth century innovation and one that had been born in the midst of controversy. In more recent years, I have researched this controversy, and for any reader who might be interested, the results can be found in my book entitled: *Historical and Prophetical Deliberations*.

One facet of my research on this book endeavored to discover when in history this theory was introduced. I discovered that as far as a specific date for its conception was concerned, it was unlikely that it can be found, for it grew out of debate and deductive argumentation. Through primary documents, I was able to conclude that the theory began to come to the forefront of discussion in the middle of the nineteenth century. Since then, it is phenomenal how the theory has captured the minds of so many Christian leaders, and has thus drifted down to the doctrinal

thought patterns of millions of Christians. One strange anomaly of this theory is that it does not have one explicit passage of Scripture to support it. During the early debates in the middle of the nineteenth century, B. W. Newton, one of the leaders in the Plymouth Brethren movement, contended that it was so dangerous that it could destroy Christianity (Harold H. Rowden's, *The Origin's of the Brethren*. p. 233).

Two other well known opponents of this theory were not hesitant to make their opinion known. Robert Cameron raised a thoughtful objection when he exclaimed that it disturbed him when he pondered the fact that such a theory could be introduced as a test of fellowship, when it does not have a single passage of Scripture upon which “to rest its feet.” Nathaniel West, a prophetic Bible scholar of no mean reputation, examined the theory and was able to state that, “it has nothing new in it that is true and nothing true in it that is new.” His words, in his article: *The Apostle Paul and the Any Moment Theory*, published in 1893, are frank and stunning: “We need not pursue this theory further. It aggravates. It is built on a postulate, vicious in logic, violent in exegesis, contrary to experience repudiated by the early church, contradicted by the testimony of eighteen hundred years, rejected by all the three schools of interpretation, and condemned by all the standard scholars of every age.”

My reason for sharing the above quotes is simply to let it be known that there have been Bible scholars who, even after studying the theory, never did accept it. This, at the very least, should tell us that Cameron had good reason to be exercised if, as he contended, it is without solid Bible support. If he were in error, how could a brilliant scholar such as West ever make the kind of statement he did? Should my reader think otherwise, I would think that he would at least excite enough incentive to examine the supposed evidence upon which it is based.

I also call attention to the above theory primarily to highlight one of the causes of the confusion that surrounds the

doctrine of the second coming of Christ. The controversy can be further extended simply by raising questions connected with the reign of Christ. Such questions are usually discussed under the headings of pre., post., and amillennialism. However, going off into these questions would expand this booklet into a fair-sized book. Hence, my main purpose in reviewing the course of New Testament eschatology would be defeated. I think that the nineteenth century popular theory that there will be two future comings of Christ has already in itself produced results that have had negative consequences on the blessed unity of Christian fellowship.

Let me say a brief word about the approach my discussion will follow. In order to accomplish my goal, I intend to pursue a progressive New Testament chronological method. By this I mean that I will begin in the Four Gospels, and then move into the Acts of the Apostles. Then, I will survey the New Testament Epistles and finally conclude with an analysis of the last book in the Bible, The Revelation of John. By taking a chronological approach, it should be easier to consider the basic questions as to when, if at all, in Holy Scripture this novel doctrine was first introduced and by whom? Surely, a doctrinal matter of such consequences could hardly creep into apostolic thinking without letting readers know about it? As to its being born in nineteenth century England, the reader will then have opportunity to see if Cameron, or West, knew what they were talking about.

Nonetheless, the fact remains, in spite of what these men wrote, and an ample number of others (such as Samuel Tregellus, George Muller, Alexander Reese, William J. Eerdman, W. G. Moorhouse, George E. Ladd, Robert Gundry, and Norman Doty), that there is only one final court of appeal for doctrine and practice when it comes to the Christian faith, and that is the inscripturated word of God. Having said what I just said, let it also be said that we cannot allow any room for the ephemeral sophistication of reading between the lines. Such deductive logic can so easily creep into human doctrinal statements and become deeply cemented in

many minds. But the essential question remains: Can it be found anywhere explicitly taught in the Bible?

# CHAPTER 1

## THE GOSPEL RECORDS

Before raising any questions related to the subtleties of arguments that supposedly support a second coming of Christ before his actual second coming, I think that it would be wise to consider the historical and dispensational significance of his first coming. This will help prepare the reader's mind for a more comprehensive understanding of what Bible students call progressive revelational development. This principle might be new to some readers, but it will soon become clear as I proceed. In short, it simply signifies that the content of the Bible contains what could be called a plot, but one that was revealed gradually, so that there was an increase in details and knowledge as the reader progresses through the Bible.

With this purpose in mind, I would therefore begin with the relation between the Four Gospels and the Old Testament. The New Testament opens with the statement: "*The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.*" Immediately, the reader is made aware that Jesus was related to King David, and to the Patriarch Abraham. Before too long it is made clear that he is presented as the promised Messiah, the one who would be king of the Jews. Hence, therefore, as might be expected, his ministry was related to the nation of Israel. Let me suggest that my reader take time to consider what is stated in the following references from John's Gospel, a Gospel possibly written with Gentile readers in mind: John 1:11-23, 29-31, 41, 45, 49; 4:25, 26. I would then suggest that the following passages also be considered: Luke 1:30-33; Isaiah 9:5-7; 40:1-5, 10, and also Daniel 2:44; 7:14, and Acts 1:6.

If the above references are insufficient, then there are the explicit statements found in the Synoptic Gospel, passages such as Matthew 10:5-7; 15:24, and 16:27, 28. Thus, the face value

meaning of these references leave no doubt whatsoever that Jesus was sent primarily to the nation of Israel. Yes, I know this fact was to change with the apostleship of Paul, and it did, as it is made quite obvious in Acts chapters 9 and 10. It is also made apparent in the statement in Acts 11:18. But did the change introduce an entirely different second coming? Some will say without hesitation "Yes. It did!" This is the Rubicon for some who hold to a second coming before the second coming. Although, believe it or not, there are those who claim that there are two future separate comings in the Gospels.

One thing I learn from those who thus read between the lines is the fact that presuppositions can somehow or other enable readers to see things that are just not there. However, if I turn my attention to this question, at this point, then I am getting ahead of myself. I do not want to be guilty of promoting anachronistic judgments. In other words, I do not want to anticipate revelation, for such is often the cause of inadvertently creating confusion. So let me get back to the question of Christ's ministry which was, as the biblical text makes quite clear, to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. Gentiles do not really come into the picture till Paul enters the scene.

#### MARK 8:27-38

Let me then take my reader back to the Gospel records and consider for example, such a passage as Mark 8:27-38. In identifying Jesus, Peter declared, "*Thou art the Christ.*" (vs. 29). What he was saying is that Jesus was the promised Messiah, the one who would sit on the throne of David, and who would reign over the the house of Israel, and be king in the kingdom of God (Lk. 1:32, 33; 2:11; Jn. 1:49, 50). However, let it be noted that even Paul, when he began his preaching, also made it clear that Jesus was "the Christ." (Acts 9:22). Moreover, in his preaching at Thessalonica, he reasoned out of the scriptures, that Jesus was "the Christ." (Acts 17:3). Did he ever change his mind about the Messianic identity of Jesus? It would hardly seem likely, because

when he explained the nature of the mystery that God had revealed to him, he made it clear that God would eventually head up all things in “the Christ.” (Eph. 1:10).

The remainder of Mark 8:27-38 should be noted carefully because, as it implies, there would not be any wholesale acceptance of Jesus by the Jews. In fact, Jesus predicted that he would be rejected by the political and religious leaders of his day, even to the extent of their killing him (Mat. 8:31). The passage begins to conclude with a call to faithfulness, both to the Lord Jesus himself, and to the truth of the Gospel of the coming kingdom.

Mark's Gospel opened with the statement that he was going to be writing about the gospel of Jesus Christ. It continued with a description of the ministry of John the Baptist who was preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, a ministry that was picked up by Jesus himself, and like John, one that called for repentance and water baptism, a ritual that symbolized the washing away of sins.

The subject of water baptism has been, since the very first centuries of the Church Fathers, one of the most controversial doctrines among Christians. Why this should be so is not easy to explain. That it was a symbolical Levitical cleansing ritual is made very clear in the Gospel records and in Acts 22:16. But, the point that should be made clear at this point is that the gospel (the good news) was about Jesus Christ, and about the coming of the kingdom of God. The response required the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins, and faith in Jesus as the Christ, the promised Messiah (Mk. 1:14, 15).

The last verse in Mark chapter 8 is of significant importance in connection with the doctrine of the future coming of Christ. It reads: “*Whosoever therefore shall be ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation; of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he cometh in the glory of his Father with the holy angels* (Mk. 8:38). Four things might be

noted: (1) The title “the Son of Man” is a Messianic title, as can be seen in Daniel 7:13, 14, 27, (2) The Lord Jesus did not sugar-coat the spiritual temperature of his generation, (3) He spoke of his coming with the holy angels in the glory of his Father, and (4) That judgment is implicitly associated with his coming. Future studies will reveal additional aspects. but these four points remain prominent in many of the later references pertaining to his coming.

Summarizing what has been noted about the earthly ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ, it can be said, without fear of dispute, that it was primarily to Israel (Rom. 15:8). In Paul's words, he was sent forth during the era of the law in order to “*redeem them that were under the law*” (Gal. 4:4-7). Such statements make it very clear that at this historical juncture he was indeed sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. Many Christians seem to have a difficult time in accepting this observation. Nevertheless, the fact remains, and to reject it, suggests that there is an intellectual myopic problem of some kind that is present, and also a lack of appreciation for the principle of progressive revelational development.

Would this mean that during his earthly ministry, the gift of salvation was based on a strict observance of the law of Moses? If so, then it harbors a contradiction. Thus, a great deal of confusion and controversy surrounds this question. According to Habakkuk 2:4, which is quoted in Romans 1:17, Galatians 3:11, and Hebrews 10:38, justification before God is by faith. When James wrote of the doctrine of justification by works, he was speaking of the practical demonstration of faith (Jam. 2:17-26). In other words, genuine faith cannot be separated from trust in God and in obedience to his Word. The hymn writer understood this when he wrote: “Trust and obey, for there is no other way to be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey.”

Biblical faith is essentially pro-active, and it is manifested in a “positive” heartfelt obedience to the word of God. If a person claims to have faith, it will be a motivating quality that will

inevitably be manifested in his life. As the writer to the Hebrews wrote: “*But without faith it is impossible to to please God.*” (Heb. 11: 6). And as the remainder of the context of this statement reveals, there is a long list of saints whose faith was evident in their works.

It was never mere external actions by themselves that would bring salvation. Even the one passage, which is used more than any other to argue in favor of salvation by works, it is made very clear that the problem was in the heart of the rich young ruler, for he apparently had tried to keep the law, and yet he did not have the faith to follow Jesus (Mat. 19:16-29; Mk. 10:17-23; Lk. 18:18-26).

The context of the dialogue between Jesus and the rich young ruler is one that ties together such notions as: “inheriting eternal life, entrance into the kingdom of God, and salvation,” all of which are connected with the promise to his disciples, that “*in the regeneration (the paliggenesia, i.e. the new state of things) when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.*” (Mat. 19:28).

In some ways, the dialogue itself calls to mind what Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 1:21-31. It also reminds me of the one indispensable requirement, even those in the Old Testament times, that it was the circumcision of the heart that brought the blessings of God. Therefore, it was never of works, *per se*, and was always by faith, which meant acknowledgment of God's will, and evidence in obedience to it.

During the ministry to Israel, the Lord Jesus made it very clear that it was only the faith attitude of the heart that would be accepted by God and only such faith could guarantee an inheritance in the kingdom of God. This can be seen in the meaning of the eight beatitudes with which the Lord Jesus began his famous Sermon on the Mount (See: Mat. 5:1-20). This so-

called sermon represents his constant teaching. It begins with words that speak of the requirement of a bankrupt spirit before God as being necessary to qualify for an inheritance in the kingdom of God. Together with this spirit, there was required sorrow over sin, a teachable disposition, a hunger for righteousness, a manifestation of mercy, a purity of heart, a peacemaking demeanor, and a firm commitment to Christ regardless of revilement and persecution. Only sincere faith can produce such qualities, and such qualities were expected of all who would be heirs of the kingdom of God.

This overall quality of life began with repentance and submission to the ritual of water baptism which would signify the washing away of sins. Moreover, this response would be an open indication of acknowledgment that Jesus was the Messiah, and would grant to those acknowledging their willingness to follow him the hope of an inheritance in the kingdom of God. The hope of salvation could also be called the gift of eternal life. But as has already been noted many, particularly among the leaders in Israel, were void of such faith.

So, when it comes to the doctrine of the return of Christ, the Synoptics are clear, it is associated with the hope of salvation, a hope (confident expectation) that will be realized at the time of his return. Moreover, his return, as already noted, will bring about the realization of the kingdom of God upon the earth.

## THE OLIVET DISCOURSE

Before moving along to the Olivet Discourse of Jesus, I might pause for a brief moment, and ponder the question: If what I have just written is so clear, why should there be any controversy? I raise the question simply because it is one I have heard hundreds of times. However, it is a question not easily answered and one that would require a wide digression. I could dismiss it and simply remind my reader that men and women disagree on thousands of subjects, but with regard to this subject, there is the fact that appeal

can be made to the accepted authority of Holy Scripture.

Early in the history of the Christian Church there was an ambiguous attitude that believed that the truth had been committed to the church. A Christian was someone who believed what the church believed, and the church believed what a Christian believed, and they both believed the same thing. But who, what, and where was the church? The answer was that the church was the depository of truth, and wherever one found the truth one found the church. In other words, wherever a group of Christians were gathered together, and held to the truth, there could be found the one true church. My reader by now is no doubt troubled and wondering about my “doublespeech.” To anyone with a logical mind, not only am I engaging in double talk, but I am guilty of multiple *non sequiturs*.”

Little wonder that Augustine, Bishop of Hippo, in the fourth century tried to resolve the ramifications of this quagmire of thought by coming up with the formula: “*Roma locuta est, causa finita est.*” (Rome has spoken, the case is ended). However rather than solving the fundamental question in resolving differences between believers in doctrinal matters, he helped open the door to the most disastrous misdevelopment that could hardly ever have been imagined. Before too long, primitive Christianity turned into an authoritative legalistic and sacramentarian, institution (See, Emil Brunner, *The Christian Doctrine of the Church, Faith, and Dogmatics*, Vol. III, p. 59).

Questions and problems there might be, but let me say again, that the final word is that there remains only one supreme court of appeal in matters of faith and doctrine. My 300 page book, *Historical and Prophetic Deliberations*, illustrates just how prolix this question is, and how inextricably interwoven it is with the historical, and psychological phenomenon of human traditions. So, while aspects of the question might arise, even in this small booklet, I would prefer to stay on a more positive track and follow further the progressive chronological record that I have suggested.

However, let me put in writing a brief warning, namely that the entrance of human traditions, and false premises, with regard to biblical interpretations, can hide insidious dangers. In my work, that I just mentioned, the one main theoretical postulate that contributed more to obscuring the clear teaching concerning the biblical doctrine of the second coming of Christ is of comparative recent vintage. It was introduced into Christian theology about 150 years ago, and in the last century has spread like wildfire. It has raised a disturbing thought, for it reveals how Christians, even while professing allegiance to biblical authority, can buy into a theory that, as was previously noted, has neither explicit biblical support, or historical roots in church history. But like I have just said, those who may be interested can find more extensive discussion in my book where historical and prophetic factors receive comprehensive treatment. As for this present work, let me move along to Jesus' Olivet Discourse which can be found in Matthew, Mark, and Luke.

The discourse was sparked by the twofold question of Jesus' disciples. They wanted to know when would the temple and the city be destroyed, and what would be the sign of his future coming? It covers a series of time-consuming events, and as far as the future coming of the Lord Jesus himself is concerned, it is predicted to be after a period of time described as being the great tribulation (Mat. 24:21, 29). If there is anything intervening between this great tribulation and Jesus' future coming, it is a series of cataclysmic signs in the heavens.

Such phenomenal signs are elsewhere associated with the coming of what is known as the day of the LORD, in which, God alone will be exalted, the ungodly will be judged, and the saints will inherit the kingdom of God (Isa. 2:11, 17-22; 26:20, 21; Zech. 14:1-9). The Jewish targums in Zechariah 14:9, and Malachi 4:7 both insert the words: "the kingdom of God." John, in his Revelation 11:15-19 depicts this day as taking place with the sounding of the last of seven trumpets, which also synchronizes

with the resurrection of the saints of God, and also with the pouring out of the bowls of God's wrath upon the "earth dwellers" (Rev. 15:1; 16:1). Paul also spoke of this day and connected it with the last trumpet and the future coming of the Lord Jesus, and with the wrath of God (1 Cor. 15:52-58; 1 Thess. 5:2, 4, 9).

The practical application of Jesus' discourse was that there was the need for men and women to be prepared for the coming of this day. It was only those thus prepared who would inherit the kingdom of God (Mat. 25:32-34). Those not prepared would go into everlasting punishment (Mat. 25:46). The message was clear, and only those who became disciples of Jesus; who truly had sincere faith in him, and had repented of their sins would enter into the inheritance of God's coming kingdom. That Paul preached the coming of this kingdom of God can hardly be disputed since it is stated that he did preach it (Acts 20:24, 25; 28: 23, 30, 31).

One noteworthy observation about the coming of Christ and the establishment of the kingdom of God, is the statement that no man knows the day or hour when it will happen. In spite of this categorical statement, countless numbers of so-called Bible students down through the centuries have nevertheless worked diligently to give the world the day and the hour.

## SUMMARY

In summarizing this first chapter, I would remind my reader that my main concern has been primarily to clear away the fog of misunderstanding concerning the doctrine of the second coming of Christ. This can only be done by allowing the sun rays of Holy Scripture to shine through the fog. As I have already illustrated, there is not only widespread ignorance of this doctrine, but also a diversity of opinion and consequent confusion over what the Bible actually teaches. For example, as has been noted, few Christians seem to be aware that the earthly ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ was directly related to the nation of Israel. The idea that it had a restricted bailiwick is hardly ever mentioned in most Christian

churches. Yet, among those who did acknowledge the historical and geographical limitations, there arose in the nineteenth century a theory that the doctrine of his second coming must therefore have two separate aspects to it: One related to Israel and the other related to the Church. Or, as is even more simplistically stated, because Israel is earthly and the church is heavenly. This contrast, or dualistic emphasis, forms the elements of the premise from which logical deductions are made that argue for two future comings.

Be this as it may, the facts remain that Christ's ministry was focused on the need for the people of Israel to be ready for the coming of the kingdom of God. They did this by faith, in which they acknowledged that Jesus was the Messiah, and by repenting of their sins, and by submitting to water baptism, which was a Jewish Levitical symbolical act of cleansing. Their profession of faith, and remission of sins, was then followed by their obedient discipleship to the teachings of Jesus. Thus, they inherited the hope (confident assurance) of entering into the future kingdom of God which would be established when Jesus returned. Those failing to repent and believe would not enter, but would be cast into everlasting fire.

In sum, this was the core of the ministry of Jesus. In my book, *What Did Jesus Preach?* these foregoing points are discussed at greater length, and the main conclusion is reached that according to the Gospel records, the future coming of Christ synchronizes with the establishment of the kingdom of God.

## CHAPTER 2

### THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

Moving out of the Gospel records, into the Acts of the apostles, Luke, the author, tells his readers that he is picking up where he left off in his “former treatise,” which would be the Gospel of Luke. In doing so, he made it clear that Jesus had risen from the dead and that he had been seen of his disciples by many infallible proofs. He also made it clear that following his resurrection, Jesus had continued to speak of things pertaining to the kingdom of God. That Israel continued to figure prominently is equally evident by the fact that the disciples wondered if it would be in the near future that God would “*restore again the kingdom to Israel?*” (Acts 1:7). This is further made evident by the continuous references to the house of Israel. Also the qualification for entrance into this future kingdom was the same: “*Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins . . . ,*” and according to the text, about 3,000 did, and were added to the church (Acts 2:38, 47).

There is at least one other significant observation that I might make that has a close relationship to the commission that was given to the disciples of Jesus at this period of time. The commission was to begin at Jerusalem, but it was ultimately to include the whole world (Acts 1:8; Mat. 28:19, 20; Mk. 16:16, 17; Lk. 24:45-47). I mention this fact because it raises an interesting question that has caught the imagination of many Christians. It concerns the theory known as any-momentism. This theory, as the word implies, holds that there are no signs that will precede the coming of Christ. In other words He could come at any moment. But how could this be the case since the so-called great commission itself would involve the passing of time. The same could be said even with regard to the life and ministry of Paul. He was called and commissioned to go the Gentiles. He even had a word from the Holy Spirit that certain future events in his life

would involve time (Acts 20:20-25). This would not mean that Christ's coming was no longer imminent, but it would mean that while it was on the horizon of fulfillment, it was hardly coming at any-moment. In fact, the Olivet Discourse of Christ made it very clear that there would be telltale signs, by which, the disciples would "*know that summer was nigh.*" (Mat. 24:32-34). The possibility of delay would make sense if the time had been specified, but let it be remembered that no man knew the day or the hour of his coming, and of the establishment of the kingdom. Peter addressed the thought of the prolongation of time in his Second Epistle chapter 3.

In Acts chapters 2 and 3, Peter is the main speaker, and he made it clear that what he was preaching was not a secret, but had been predicted in the Old Testament. In fact, he specifically declared that what happened on the day of Pentecost was that which "*was spoken by the prophet Joel.*" (Acts 2:16). In this connection, not only does he specifically relate it to Israel, but he also ties the cataclysmic signs in the heavens to the coming of "*the great and terrible day of the LORD . . . .*" He concluded by saying: "*And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the LORD shall be saved. (Joel 2:32).* The passage from which he quoted, ended with the words: "*. . . for in mount Zion and in Jerusalem shall be deliverance, as the LORD hath said, and in the remnant who the LORD shall call.*"

In his second sermon, Peter addressing the house of Israel once again, spoke to them of the "*God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob, the God of our fathers, hath glorified his Son Jesus . . . ,*" and that he was the one whom they had killed, and as was the point of his message, required that they repent and be converted, in order that their sins be blotted out, for God was going to send Jesus and "*the times of refreshing*" that is, "*the restitution (apokatastasis) of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of of all his holy prophets since the world began.*" would then be inaugurated (Acts 3:19-21).

The message and the identity of Peter's audience could hardly be misunderstood. He was speaking to the children of the prophets, and his message was requiring repentance and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, for there was none other name under heaven given among men whereby they could be saved (Acts 3:26; 4:12).

For a moment, let me jump forward to Peter's two epistles which were written at least thirty years after his sermons at Pentecost, and were written to the diaspora Jews throughout various parts of Asia Minor, an area where Paul had also ministered. Peter, in his first epistle wrote of “*a living hope,*” “*an inheritance,*” and of “*salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.*” (1 Pet. 1:1-5). Could he now be speaking of a different hope and different inheritance from what had been predicted in the Gospel records, and the early Acts? If he were, then it must have created a strange and strained relation with believers who had been present at Pentecost. Can anyone really imagine the Gentile believers beginning to speak of a different hope, than the coming that Peter had been speaking about, while these Jewish believers had to wait, and suffer great tribulation, and then after a seven-year-interim, finally enter into the hope of glory that had been their hope since the time when John the Baptist had begun his ministry (Col. 1:27; 1 Pet. 1:7-13; 4:13; 5:4)?

Peter's second epistle not only explains why there seems to be a delay in the coming of Christ, but he was led to remind his readers, that even as Jesus had predicted, there would be false prophets who would come, scoffingly asking, “*Where is the promise of his coming?*” (2 Pet. 3:3, 4). He also identified the coming of the Lord Jesus with the day of the Lord, even as Paul did (2 Pet. 3:9, 10; 1 Thess. 5:2-4). It should be noted in these passages that the analogy of a coming of a thief is used even as the Lord Jesus used it (Mat. 24:43). Another point worthy of note is the fact that Peter brought in the ministry of Paul to help explain why there was a prolongation of time. He also related it to the longsuffering of God, who was not willing that any should perish, “*but that all should come to repentance.*” (2 Pet. 3:9, 15, 16).

## COMING BACK TO THE EARLY ACTS

Coming back to the Acts of the Apostles, it is quite obvious that the first eight chapters cover the increasing resistance of the Jewish leadership and population to the gospel that the disciples of Jesus were preaching. This was made particularly apparent in the story of the stoning of Stephen recorded in chapters 6 and 7. Thus, on the whole, the remnant that had repented and believed were seemingly of little consequence. But it was here at this event that a significant thing happened. Saul of Tarsus, enters the scene, first as the arch-persecuter, then, shortly thereafter, as the apostle to the Gentiles. In both historical and theological perspective, this event has repercussions that are difficult to over-appreciate.

I say this because few historians seem to realize the profound influence that this man Saul, later known by his Gentile name Paul, has had upon human history. The chief Rabbi of London, England, at the end of the nineteenth century, actually contended that it was Paul, and not Jesus who was the founder of Christianity. Of course he was wrong, because as Paul wrote: "*For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus (the) Christ.*" (1 Cor. 3:11). However, amazingly, without automobiles, trains, planes, radio, television, and telephones, he was able to take the gospel of Jesus Christ to the known world of his day. Let it be remembered that the Lord Jesus had predicted that the gospel of the kingdom would be preached in all the world before the end of that age (Mat. 24:14). From what Paul wrote in Colossians 1:23, it would appear that this had indeed been accomplished. Moreover, it was accomplished within one generation.

In order to come close to an appropriate appreciation of Paul's ministry, it is necessary to understand the nature of the revelation of the mystery that was given to him (Eph. 3:1-12; Col. 1:24-27). Such understanding will also help explain the deep rooted animosity of many Jews toward him and his ministry. Let

the reader give some serious thought to Paul's testimony before the angry Jewish mob in the Temple at Jerusalem; particularly Acts 22:30-36, and verses 21-23.

However, the significance of Paul's entrance on the historical scene, and his apostleship to the Gentiles, seem to remain of little consequence in the minds of many Christians. If my reader doubts this let him ask the average believer to explain the nature of the revelation of the mystery that was given to Paul, and to answer the simple question: "Why Paul?"

In order to give a full answer to this question it would be necessary to comprehend the radical transition that is set forth in Acts 9, 10, and 15. We are told that immediately after his conversion and commission Paul preached "*Christ in the synagogues, that he is the Son of God.*" (Acts 9:20). More than this, can it be imagined that the one who was the arch-persecutor of the church, a leading Pharisee of the strictest sect, was now the leading apostle to the Gentiles? In the words of Luke, he had been making havoc of the church. If his ministry is not an amazing intervention of God, then we cannot begin to explain Peter's attitude toward the Gentiles in the vision that he tried to resist in Acts chapter 10. Little wonder that the six Jewish brethren of Peter were moved to ask: "*Then hath God also to the gentiles granted repentance unto life?*" (Acts 11:18).

It would seem that one of the main reasons that Peter was finally convinced to go to a Gentile household was to help prepare the way for Paul's apostleship. This possibility could be indicated in Acts 15 by what happened at the Jerusalem council. The main issue was the reaction to the conversion of Gentiles. It was Peter who stood up and declared that it was by his mouth that the first Gentiles had heard the word of the gospel and had believed (Acts 15:7). What then was the problem? It was that Jewish believers had been teaching that Gentiles should be circumcised if they were to be saved (Acts 15: 1, 2, 5).

Before Paul came on the scene, this had been required by Gentile proselytes, along with water baptism, law keeping, and a sacrificial offering. The concluding decision of the council was that in order to refrain from being a stumbling block to Jewish believers, Gentiles who believed the gospel, should abstain from “*pollutions of idols, and from fornication, and from things strangled, and from blood.*” (Acts 15:20, 29).

There is an interesting reflection that comes to mind with regard to this meeting between Paul, Barnabas, and the Jewish leaders at the Jerusalem Council, and it concerns the lack of any mention of the supposed new development with regard to a second coming before the second coming. The meeting had resulted from Paul's first missionary journey. On the whole, the Jews in some areas had rejected the gospel message, and in fact, even attempted to kill Paul. This, in spite of the miraculous signs and wonders that they had witnessed. Thus, it was on this journey that Paul told the believers that it would be through much tribulation that they would enter into the kingdom of God (Acts 14:22). When they returned to Antioch of Syria they reported with great exuberance how God had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles. But there is no inkling of any new doctrinal teaching about a secret coming before the second coming. Besides, if there had been, would not the Jewish believers have been curious about their hope?

What I have said about the first missionary journey, and the decisions of the Jerusalem Council, could also be said of the second missionary journey. There was still doctrinal conflict between Jewish and Gentile believers, but it was not about any supposed introduction of a new special secret coming of Christ. If there had been, then I would ask again, did it mean that the Jewish disciples lost their original hope and were given a new and different hope? And let us remember there were Jews also being saved on these journeys. They had their scriptures, and their hope of an inheritance in the kingdom of God. This hope was the one promised to them by the God who cannot lie. Paul began his ministry preaching that Jesus was the Messiah. (Acts 17:3). He

never stopped preaching this message. His enemies at Thessalonica accused him of being disloyal to Caesar, and of preaching king Jesus. This would of course be expected since he was preaching the kingdom of God, and this is what he was doing. Incidentally, he saw no contradiction with the fact that while he was preaching the gospel of the grace of God, he was also preaching the kingdom of God (Acts 20:24, 25).

Let it be noted that at Athens, he also preached repentance, for as he said, God “*hath appointed a day in which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead.*” (Acts 17:31). This man was of course, Jesus the Messiah (Acts 18:28). When he was at Ephesus, he was also still teaching and preaching the kingdom of God (Acts 19:8; Eph. 5:5). But then, even at Rome, he was still teaching about the kingdom of God (Acts 28:23, 30, 31). I have repeated this fact simply because I have heard time and time again that Paul did not preach the kingdom of God, and that his ministry focused exclusively on the preaching of the grace of God.

Should any reader be curious about the continued relation between the Jewish and Gentile believers, there were still areas of discord, but as to their future hope, it is apparent that the inheritance remained the same (Acts 26: 17-29). For the world at large, the outlook was judgment, but for the believer, whether Jew of Gentile, it was salvation. This will be verified even further when in the next chapter we look into the testimony of the epistles.

## SUMMARY

Historically, the scope of the Acts of the Apostles is primarily concerned with the spread of the gospel through-out the *oikoumene* (*the known world of that day*). This gospel, can be called the gospel of Jesus Christ, of God, of salvation, and of the coming kingdom of God. The first third of the Acts, like the Synoptic Gospels, focuses on Israel; the last two thirds, on the

gospel going to the Gentiles. It is very obvious that whether Peter or Paul, they were both preaching the same gospel. Likewise, with regard to the second coming of Christ, there was still only one future coming. Moreover, there was no such thing as it being at any moment. It would be preceded by a number of time-consuming events, among which there would be the fulfillment of the commission that Jesus had given to go into the world, and also the prediction of the future destruction of the Temple and Jerusalem. As paradoxical as it might sound, these events do not cancel the phenomenon of imminency, for biblical prophecy often contains a primary application along with a prophetic anticipation, that foreshortens the horizon of fulfillment.

One very significant point of our discussion thus far concerns the remarkable appearance of Paul, and the door of faith opening to the Gentiles. I tried to express my chagrin over the fact that so many Christians attach hardly any significance to his apostleship and to the revelation of the mystery that God gave to him. There is no way that believers today can really appreciate the impact of this earth shaking historical development, and understand what the Jerusalem Council was all about, if they spend all their time and effort in the Four Gospels. But then, the Jewish believers themselves were not too sure how to handle the changes that were made known with the revelation of the mystery (Acts 15:1-5; Gal. 2:1-16; Eph. 2:11-3:20).

In spite of what I have just written, there is no indication that Paul introduced a different “last trumpet,” before the last trumpet, a new first resurrection before the first resurrection, and thence a second coming before the second coming (Rev. 11:15-18). The last trumpet he wrote about in 1 Corinthians 15:51-57, is the same trumpet and same resurrection that Isaiah 25:8, 9, spoke about that will be associated with the salvation aspects of the day of the LORD (Isa. 26:20, 21). Gentile believers obtained the promised inheritance of this kingdom when they believed the gospel of salvation, and they became joint heirs, a joint body, and joint partakers with believing Jews of this promise in the Christ

(Eph. 3:6; Tit. 1:2; 3:7).

Since the epistles deal primarily with doctrinal and practical matters we can now survey their content and see if they contain any evidence of this popular nineteenth century theory that there will be a secret coming of Christ before the second coming that dominated the thinking of the first believers. Saying this, calls to mind the curious contrast between the early church and the church today. Then, it was the second coming of Christ that was prominent, while today it seems to be the first coming that holds the interest of most contemporary Christians.

## CHAPTER 3

### THE EPISTLES

Among New Testament scholars there appears to be common agreement that 1 and 2 Thessalonians were chronologically first in the order of Paul's epistles. I personally think that it is more than likely that Galatians was first. My main reason for this contention is due to the nature of its content. The Jerusalem Council of Acts 15, reveals the tension experienced by the Jewish Christian leadership over the ministry of Paul to the Gentiles. Their attitude, and even Peter's resistance to the vision of Acts 10; plus the exclamation of the six Jewish brethren in Acts 11:18 reveal the shock that Paul's apostleship spawned. Obviously, an earth-shaking dispensational transition was taking place. Nevertheless, whether first or second, the Thessalonian epistles were written early in Paul's ministry, and it is noteworthy that every chapter in both epistles has significant focus on the second coming of Christ. The recipients were primarily Gentiles, but there is no indication that Paul was introducing a new doctrine of a special coming before the traditional second coming.

Another early New Testament epistle was the letter written by James; possibly written as early as 50 A.D. It was addressed to "*the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad.*" (Jam. 1:1). There was a large number of Christian Jews all over the *oikoumene*. Many of them may have been converted to Jesus the Christ at Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost. It is actually stated in Acts 2:5 that there were "*Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven.*" (2:5).

Something like 3,000 Jews had received the truth of the gospel of the coming kingdom, and had been baptized for the remission of their sins. Having believed the preaching of Peter, they would be waiting for the kingdom of God, for what Peter had called, "*the times of refreshing from the presence of the LORD,*"

when Jesus would return. (Acts 3:19-21). James, in writing to the diaspora of Jewish believers, exhorted them, in that idiomatic telescopic style that foreshortens the prophetic horizon, by writing: "*Be patient therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord. Behold, the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth. And hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and latter rain. Be ye also patient; stablish your hearts: for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh.*" (Jam. 5:7. 8). Are we to contend that this coming was a different coming than the one Paul taught?

The Jewish believers were to wait patiently for Christ's coming, just as a farmer waits patiently for the harvest of his crops. This harvest was impending, but this was not the same as the popular sensationalism of the anymoment theory. And once again, as just stated, there is not the slightest hint of a future coming before the second coming that they anticipated. Thus, Jewish believers, as well as Gentile believers, were watching and waiting for the "*blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ.*" (Tit. 2:13). In the meantime, they were to stay involved in the Lord's business till he comes (Lk 19:1-13). They were expected to live, "*soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present age.*" Such words could have been written by James. They were to keep sowing the seed of the gospel, and eventually the harvest would come.

## I AND II THESSALONIANS

Also written early, probably around 50 A.D., the two epistles to the believers at Thessalonica are replete with the doctrine of the second coming. The second epistle seems to have been written to correct the erroneous idea that the believers were suffering from the judgments of the day of the Lord. This seems to be quite clear when the Greek text in 2 Thessalonians 2:2 is considered. Instead of "*the day of Christ is at hand,*" the text should read the "*day of the Lord is now present.*" 1 Thessalonians 5:9, and Romans 5:9 state that true believers are not appointed unto the wrath of this day but to obtain salvation. The day of the Lord is

related to the time of the pouring out of the vials of wrath, which do not fall on the heads of believers, but on those who have rejected the gospel, and who go along with the mystery of lawlessness under the dictatorship of the Antichrist. When the vials of wrath are poured out, believers are not even here because they have been caught away to meet Christ in the air forever to be with him. They were also supernaturally protected when the seven trumpets sounded their warning judgments. It is stated that the last trumpet is connected with the resurrection of believers and with the promised establishment of God's kingdom (Rev. 11:15-18; 15:1).

Surveying the two epistles to the Thessalonians, it seems very clear to me that Paul was speaking of the same second coming that James had spoken about, and that can also be found in the Gospels and the Acts. I cannot find two different future comings in these epistles, even though it would appear that many do. This false assumption reminds me of the philosophical search for the proverbial black cat with the lights turned off when in reality there is actually no cat! I cannot understand the temerity that claims that a separate secret coming can be found, but it is so secret, it is hidden between the lines.

Reading what's in the lines, and not between them, the reader can find, as I have already mentioned, a reference to Christ's second coming in every chapter (1 Thess. 1:10; 2:12, 19; 3:13; 4:14-18; 5:1-9; 2 Thess. 1:5-10; 2:1-12; 3:5. There is nothing in any of these references that would imply two future comings. In fact, on the contrary, there is an interesting statement in 1 Thessalonians 2:14 that their suffering persecution, made them imitators of the Jewish churches of God which were in Judea, and which were in Christ Jesus. They were suffering for the sake of the kingdom of God, and were told that they would experience little rest until the time, “. . . *when the Lord Jesus would 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: who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the*

*glory of his power: when he shall have come to be glorified in his saints . . . .*” Sounds something like the words of Jesus in Matthew 25:31, 41, 46.

If any reader is looking for time-indicators they are there, and not hidden between the lines. They do not set forth two different comings. But what about the fact that believers are caught up to meet the Lord in the air? Is this fact not different than other passages? Is it really different from 2 Thessalonians 2:1, which in context, tells believers that before the day of the Lord can come two things are going to happen: (1) The APOSTASY, and (2) the MAN OF SIN, will be revealed. Oh, the armchair gymnastics that the two-coming theory has brought to this passage!

I deal with these armchair gymnastics in my booklet entitled, *A Second Look at the Second Coming*. The booklet has had a fairly wide distribution, and has helped to open the eyes of many Christians. It deals with all the passages in the New Testament, which mention the second coming of Christ. Such a treatment enables believers to consider for themselves all the biblical evidence. Copies of the booklet are available without charge, but there is a caveat: there might be a cost, for as many have discovered, the two-coming theorists seem to have a difficult time with those who seek to emulate the Bereans in Acts 17:11.

It is a conundrum to me why such intolerant reactions can be found, when all that is required is the answer to the question: “What saith the Scriptures.?” Paul asked the question: “*Am I therefore become your enemy, because I tell you the truth?*” (Gal. 4:16). How could such be? Let us remember, and be careful what we find in denominational statements, for after all, they are in reality examples of human traditions.

Anyway, I do not intend to repeat the structure and content of the above mentioned booklet. I have mentioned it, in case my reader would appreciate a handy survey of all the New Testament passages that deal specifically with the second coming of Christ.

My final chapter in this present booklet will endeavor to cover synoptically the last book in the Bible: *The Revelation of St John the Divine*.

## AS TOUCHING THE OTHER EPISTLES

**ROMANS:** Paul wrote to the church at Rome, where, there happened to be a mixture of Jewish and Gentile Christians. He did not found this church, but he was intent on a visit as soon as it was possible. There are quite a few passages that touch on the second coming. I will list them, so that my reader, should he so desire, can check them for himself, and thus discover if there is even a scintilla of evidence to suggest that Paul had introduced a new second coming doctrine: Romans 4:9-25; 5:1-21; 6:23; 8:1, 16-39; 11:1-29; 13:11-14; 14:10-13; 15:27; 16:20, 25.

Now surely, if the two-coming theorists be correct, it would be expected that Paul would have introduced it and explained it, by the time he wrote his epistle to the Romans. Paul had been converted and commissioned some twenty-five years earlier. If the theorists are correct, then Paul faced a Herculean task, for as just stated, the epistle was intended for Jewish and Gentile believers. The mere entrance of Gentiles into the family of God appears to have been tough on the Jews, especially when Paul let it be known that they had become co-heirs with them, a joint body, and partners together with them (Eph. 3:6). In the light of their history, how could an orthodox Jew begin to contemplate such a thing? This would be a hard pill to swallow, but try to imagine if they had supposedly received a special hope! Talk about one-up-manship! Again, I would say that under such thinking, there would have been some mighty strange dialogue between Jewish and Gentile believers. If there were such, then not a jot or tittle of it appears in Paul's epistles.

With regard to the references I have cited from the Epistle to the Romans I would ask my reader to make his own deductions. The introduction to the epistle declares that Paul was separated

unto the gospel of God which had been promised in the Holy Scriptures long before he himself came on the scene. Moreover, after concluding that the whole world was guilty before God, he introduced Abraham as an example of justification by faith, and actually called him the father of all who believe. He also spoke of there being an inheritance and of it being of faith and by grace.

In chapter five he continued this theme and made it clear that the saving love of God was manifested in the death of Christ, and that believers would be saved from wrath through him. By the time he arrived at 6:23, he made it clear that believers have the promise of eternal life through the Lord Jesus Christ. (Jn. 3:16). Is this the same Christ that promised eternal life to believers in the Gospel records, or is Christ now divided? That is, do we have a heavenly Christ and earthly one? With which one do we reign? Would it be the one who will sit on the throne of David, or the one that returns and raptures us to meet him and forever to be with him? How easy it is for deductive reasoning to go from the sublime to the ridiculous?

Continuing this theme, in 8:1 he categorically stated that there is therefore now no condemnation to those who are justified in Christ. Then, at 8:18, he went so far as to say that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. Is this glory different from the glory that Daniel spoke about which will be experienced when God establishes his kingdom, and raises his saints (Dan. 7:13, 14, 22; 12:1-3; Mat. 24:30; Mk 13:26, *et. al.*). The glory he spoke about will be realized at the time when believers are raised from the dead and publicly manifested before the whole of creation and receive their full standing as sons of God. Those who have been justified have been predestined to this end (Rom. 8:23, 29, 30). Nothing can separate them from the love of God which is in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Is it only the Gentile believers who were promised such blessings? Reading the first chapter of the Ephesian epistle would

suggest otherwise. Besides, as Romans chapter 11 makes very clear, God's gifts and his call can never be withdrawn (Rom. 11:8). Moreover, as the context also declares: If the fall, and blindness of Israel be the enriching of the world, what will their fullness be? The partial blindness of Israel is temporary for the Lord Jesus will return and turn away ungodliness from Israel (Rom. 11:25-27). Note well, it states "*all Israel*" and not "all Jews." Together with this, let me remind my reader that "*they are not all Israel, which are of Israel (Rom. 9:6)*. Or, as was written earlier by Paul, ". . . *he is not a Jew who is one outwardly . . . But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly . . .*" (Rom. 2:28, 29).

This distinction needs to be noted, for while it is a mistake to identify the New Testament church of God with the nation of Israel, for such would be like saying that the nations are the nation of Israel. God's church is a called out people, an *ekklesia*, a called out group both from Israel and from the Gentiles (1 Cor. 10: 32). In spite of the analogy of the engrafting of the wild olive branches into the one olive tree, the distinction is still maintained.

In Romans 13:11, 12, Paul touched on the doctrine of the second coming in a practical manner. He clearly struck a note of imminency. A short time later, he wrote of the coming judgment seat of Christ (Rom. 14;10, 11) This passage can be compared with Philippians 2:9-11. We would then ask the question: Will there be two judgment seats of Christ?

Then in Romans 15:27, Paul explicitly mentions that Gentiles have been made partakers of Israel's spiritual things. And finally, he concludes this epistle with a benediction that speaks of "*the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began,*" and which was now, "*made known to all nations for the obedience of faith.*" (Rom. 16:25, 26).

Thus, as to the content of the Roman Epistle, there was never any secret coming of Christ anywhere within its pages.

Attempting to insert one, and concluding that there must therefore be two future comings of Christ, ends up with disunity among the saints of God, and tends to distort face value exegesis, and to encourage the inadvertent wishful reading between the lines.

### COMPLETING THE SURVEY

I need to speed up my survey of the epistles otherwise this small booklet will end up being a fair size book. Let me then briefly draw attention to Paul's two letters to the Corinthian church. As any reader will quickly discover, these two letters make it quite clear that this church was plagued by carnality and schism, especially with regard to the *charismata*, the spiritual gifts. However, in spite of this acknowledgment, Paul pointed out that these believers were waiting for the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. The word "waiting" is the Greek word, *decomenous*, and it essentially conveys the notion of an attitude of mind that usually exerts influences on behavior. However, in this context, the influences were not necessarily positive. Paul was intent on mitigating such consequences, and bringing some order to the church. I say what I am about to say with caution, but I have observed that much of the contemporary so called neo-pentecostal charismatic movement, with which I have had personal contact, seems to possess exactly the same characteristics as did the Corinthian churches. Anyway, apart from this observation, the members of the church at Corinth were said to be looking away to the day when the hope of Christ's return would be realized. Apparently, while such an attitude of expectancy should impact their behavior in positive ways, it would seem that other factors mitigated such consequences. However, while imminency remained, it was sometimes accompanied by extremes of disorderly excitement and behavior that were counterproductive to behavior that brings glory to God. For anyone interested in this phenomenon, I would recommend the reading of Norman Cohen's book, *The Pursuit of the Millenium*.

The word "coming" in 1 Corinthians 1:7, is not the Greek

word “parousia,” but the word “*apokalupsis*,” which signifies “unveiling” or “revealing.” It is the word that gives us the title of the last book in the Bible. The next verse uses the words “*in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ*.” I will have more to say about this in my next and last chapter. In the meantime my reader is invited to look carefully for himself at 2 Thessalonians 2:1-17.

1 Corinthians 15:50-58 is another passage that is relevant to our overall discussion. In this passage, Paul spoke about inheriting the kingdom of God, and also of the resurrection at the time of the sounding of the last trumpet. According to Isaiah chapters 25-27 these two events would take place in the coming of the day of the Lord, when the Lord alone would be exalted. (Isa. 2:12, 17). There is nothing secret about this day. More will be said on this score by and by when we review the book of the Revelation.

### CONCLUDING THIS CHAPTER

There are more verses that could be considered, but with the goal of being brief, I turn to the last three epistles that Paul wrote. Two of them were written to Timothy, and one to Titus. They were written about 62 A.D., and Paul was martyred in 67 A.D. I mention these dates because if Paul had introduced a new secret coming of Christ it surely would be apparent by these dates that mark the end of his life.

The four main references are 1 Timothy 6:4, and 2 Timothy 4:1, 8; Titus 2:13. The first reference contains an exhortation to live above reproach, “*until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ*.” The words which immediately follow leave little doubt that this appearing will also be associated with the time when the Lord Jesus comes to reign over the kingdom of God. 2 Timothy 4:1 harmonizes with this contention, and also 4:8. There is no thought here of any secret second coming before his coming in power and great glory. The same can be said of Titus 2:13. This appearing (*epiphaneia*) brings destruction to the man of sin; it ends the earthly service of Christians during the present age, it synchronises

with the judgment of the living and the dead, and is set forth as “*the blessed hope*” of the children of God.

In the so-called Hebrew Christian epistles there are a few references that should also be mentioned. We have already touched upon Jude 5:6, and 7, but there are those references found in 1 Peter 1:7, 13; 5:4, and in 2 Peter 1:16; 3:4, and also 1 John 2:28. The context of 1 Peter 1:7, 13, leaves no doubt that Peter was not writing of any secret unprophesied future revelation of Christ. Since the epistle was written sometime *circa* 64 A. D., if the secret coming were also being taught at the same approximate time, it would make for a strange combination of events in which some Jews and Gentile believers would be looking for one hope while others would be looking for a different one. The same might be said about 2 Peter 3:4-16, and 1 John 2:28.

I cannot help but wonder that if the doctrine of two future comings of Christ is supposedly so prominent in the New Testament Scriptures, as is often imagined by many Christians today, how is it that there is no passage to support it, but that the very thesis winds up with so many enigmatical questions? Resulting from my studies, I find only one future coming that reveals that all believers will be manifested in glory and that it is at that time that Jesus will establish the kingdom of God. There is one parousia, not two. There is no way and no where that this singular word becomes plural. Apart from some extra biblical premise, a face value reading and interpretation of Holy Scripture, confirms this fact, and a historical survey of doctrinal development leaves little or no doubt that not one saint of God, before the middle of the nineteenth century, believed and taught it. The historical side of the question is discussed at greater length in my book, *Historical and Prophetical Deliberations*.

## CHAPTER 4

### THE BOOK OF THE REVELATION

This main scope of this chapter concerns how the content of the Revelation goes along with what I have already concluded. For any reader who might be interested I do have a larger book of some 280 pages that is more in the nature of a commentary on the whole book. It is appropriately entitled: *Reviewing the Revelation*.

Contrary to what many Christians think about the last book in the Bible, I share the opinion of Richard Bauckham, who concluded that the Revelation “. . . is a work of immense learning, astonishingly meticulous literary artistry, remarkable creative imagination, radical political critique and profound theology . . . a highly reflective vision of the divine purpose on the contemporary world.” (*The Climax of Prophecy*, pp. ix, xiii). Also, I share the view of G. T. Manley in his book, *The Return of Jesus Christ*, that the Revelation, “is at once one of the most fascinating, the most difficult, and yet most spiritually rewarding of all the books in the Bible.” (. p. 51). It is only when students stray away from the main lines and wander into by-paths of ingenious speculations and curious calculations that the book becomes a complex of “anything goes!”

While sharing quotations, let me add what Emanuel Lacunza had to say. In his book, *The Apocalypse-Revelation of Messiah*, published in England in 1827, he wrote: “The divine book, let others call it what they please, is an admirable prophecy, directed wholly to the times, immediate upon the coming of the Lord . . . . In which are announced all the principle matters which shall immediately precede; in which is announced in a manner the most magnificent the very coming of the Lord in glory and majesty, in which are announced the admirable and stupendous events which shall accompany that coming. And which shall follow it. The title of the book shows well to what it is all directed;

what is its argument, and what is its determinate end.”

I think that Lacunsa has his finger on the pulse of the book. But many do not. Probably, one of the main reasons many find the Revelation to be difficult is because it is in the genre of what scholars call apocalyptic writings, which usually are full of figurative symbolism. Another reason is perhaps that right from the word go, many commentators misinterpret 1:10. They somehow or other imagine that John was in a special spiritual mood on a particular Sunday, and in this mood he received his great vision.

With regard to this misinterpretation let me say that the first part of the Greek text might better be translated: “*I came to be, by means of the Spirit in the Lord's day.*” Greek, like English, can express the possessive in two ways: “the Lord's day,” and “the day of the Lord.” In the Italian language the possessive can only be expressed “Il giorno dell Signore.” If my reader thinks that I am just playing with words, he might want to compare Revelation 4:2; 17:3, and 21:10. Also, he might want to note that of the 113 times that the Greek preposition *en* is translated in this book by “in” this is the only place where it is translated “on.” So what I am saying? I am saying that this verse might be better rendered: *I found myself (I came to be) by means of the Spirit in the Lord's day . . . .*”

In other words, John was supernaturally transported into the day of the Lord, and his following vision was how the Lord will appear in that day. The book is a “revelation” of Jesus Christ; an unveiling of his personage in the day when he alone will return and be exalted (Isa. 2:2, 4, 12, 17; Phil. 2:9-11). This phenomenon of being transported by the agency of the Holy Spirit is well illustrated in Ezekiel 3:12; 8:3; 11:24, 25; 40:2, 3.

Then at 1:19, 20, the reader can read a description of John's commission. He was told that he should now write about what he had seen, what it signified, and how it all applied to what was yet to come. Part of the vision had involved seven churches and seven messages to seven churches. The word translated “angels” can be

interpreted to signify “messenger.” The location of these churches is in Asia. If the date of Revelation be 96 A. D. then in chapters 2 and 3 we are given insights into how these churches were faring, which would be some thirty years after Paul. Quite a few reputable scholars opt for the date 69 A. D., which would be a short spell after Paul’s martyrdom and one year before the destruction of Jerusalem.

I mention these dates because every one of the letters to the churches makes reference to the coming of Christ. E. W. Bullinger has a theory that these letters were intended for the churches that will be on earth after the secret coming of Christ. In other words, these references to the coming of Christ are to the second coming after the second coming. This is an example of how a human theory can distort the simple face value meaning of words. According to the theory, I wonder how come the believers in these churches would not have been caught up in the secret coming along with the believers who supposedly would be?

There is one other theory that somehow or other thinks that these churches are really representative of historical periods of time. This of course would mean that the student would now have to be a student of history in order to interpret the significance of the churches. How the first recipients could possibly so understand such an interpretation has me nonplussed. Why not simply view the churches as being actual churches in the first century, and understand the messages in a manner that allows for a primary association, a prophetic anticipation, and a practical application? This would certainly seem to be the case when it is noted that every one of the messages to the churches ends with the exhortation: *“He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the churches.”*

Moreover, in the opening salutation, John not only wrote that the book would tell of, *“things which must shortly come to pass,”* he also wrote: *“Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written*

*therein: for the time is at hand.*” (Rev. 1:3).

Speaking of distortions in interpretation, a much bigger one can be found in chapter 4:1, 2. The nineteenth century theory of a new any-moment secret coming faced a problem, for it needed to get the church out of the way, before the prophetic events of chapters 6-22 which lead to the realization of Christ’s second coming. Thus, when John was invited up to heaven to see the things that were yet to come, according to the theory, it was not really John, but the church that was called up. John supposedly is symbolical of the church. If such be the case one has to wonder who the Jewish and Gentile saints are who appear later in the book, and who will participate “in the *“things which must be hereafter.”*” (Rev. 4:1)? How on earth this passage can be interpreted as the fulfillment of what Paul wrote in 1 Thessalonians 4:14-17 is as wild as the verbal gymnastics the two future coming theorists apply to 2 Thessalonians 2:1-3? It surely suggests clear evidence of what is generally called, “grasping at straws.”

#### THE VIALS, TRUMPETS, AND BOWLS

When John was taken up into heaven the vision he saw, recorded in chapters 4 and 5, focused on a scroll sealed with seven seals. And the question is raised, “*Who is worthy to open the book, and loose the seals thereof?*” (Rev. 5:2). The only one worthy was Jesus Christ, “*The Lion of the tribe of Juda, the Root of David . . .*” (Rev. 5:5, 9). Let it be noted that Jesus was the One who had redeemed sinners by his blood out of every nation on the earth. The text leaves no doubt that he was the One destined to reign on the earth. What follows is the breaking of the seven seals.

Here is where we need another cautionary word. A few commentators contend that the seven seals, the seven trumpets, and seven vials repeat the same events. Such can hardly be the case for if one considers the percentages stated in the text, they are different. The relation between them actually suggests that the seventh seal, contains the seven trumpets, and the seventh trumpet

expands into the seven vials of God's wrath. This sequence might be illustrated as follows:

Seals: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Trumpets: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Vials: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

In other words, the seventh in sequence contains the next seven. Robert G. Gromacki, in his, *“New Testament Survey* (p. 397), agrees and thinks that they are all in a telescopic arrangement rather than being parallel or consecutive. Noteworthy is the fact that each one ends with, *“voices, and thundering, and lightnings.”* G. K. Beale called such phenomena: *“storm theophany anticipations and realizations.”* (*The Book of Revelation: A Commentary of the Greek Text*, p. 119). This being the case, it can be concluded that the seventh in each series, is, as 6:16, 17 might suggest, the beginning of the day of the LORD.

The warning judgments of the trumpets end with the explicit statement that the final trumpet brings into existence the kingdom of our Lord and his Christ, and that he will reign forever (Rev. 11:15). It is also stated that the time of God's wrath has come, and also the time of the resurrection and the given of rewards to his servants. But if it be the day of the Lord, then it will mean that God will also pour out his wrath on those under condemnation. I have touched on the consequences of what happens in the day of the Lord, and testified, as I have discovered, that there is salvation and there is judgment.

The seven vials contain God's wrath, and they will be poured out on the earth, but not on God's saints (Rev. 15:1; 16:1). At the seventh (the last trumpet), the saints of God will be caught up to meet the Lord in the air, and they will forever be with him (1 Cor. 15:50-55; 1 Thess. 4:13-17; 2 Thess. 2:1).

The day of the Lord will also bring judgment upon the Antichrist and upon his capital city. This is recorded in Revelation

17 and 18. Then, after this judgment, again related to the day of the Lord, there comes the prophecy of the establishment of the kingdom of God. This can be found in chapters 19-22.

## TWO FINAL PROBLEMS

Two problems arise with regard to the identity and location of the evil city, appropriately named Babylon, and with the question of whether or not the 1,000 years of chapter 20 are literal? The most accepted interpretation of the identity is that the city is Rome. Certainly, this would make a lot of sense to the first recipients. Moreover, it is easy to appreciate why the sixteenth/seventeenth century Protestant reformers considered “*MYSTERY BABYLON THE GREAT,*” to be the Roman Catholic Church. Any reader so interested can find further discussion of this question in my book, *Reviewing the Revelation*. However, I personally caution against any dogmatic tendencies. That there will be a capital city of Antichrist in the last days should not surprise anyone, when one considers his enormous power. It could be even the sacred city of Jerusalem.

With regard to the literal number of one thousand: Why not allow it to be literal? It could be figurative, as for example the use of the number seven with regard to the number of the churches, seals, trumpets, and vials, yet at the same time they are literal. But what is perhaps more significant is the fact the use of 1,260 days, 42 months, and “*a time, two times, and a half.*” all add up to three and a half years which might suggest that time measurements can be quite literal. Should this be doubted, let me suggest that Sir Robert Anderson's treatment of Daniel's prophecy of the Seventy Weeks be considered. (*The Coming Prince*).

When all is said that can be said about the two foregoing questions, the fact should not be missed that the main lines of the book of the Revelation remain quite clear. It is fundamentally a prophecy (1:3; 22:7). Jesus will return and he will establish the kingdom of God. He is, as the book testifies, the Lion of the tribe

of Judah, and the Lamb of God that shed his blood in order to redeem unto God from every tribe and language and people and nation those who will eventually reign upon the earth with him (Rev. 5:9, 10). When Handel sought a theme for his magnificent oratorio he chose Revelation 19:1-7, where John described a great multitude of voices, singing: “***Hallelujah! For the Lord our God , the Almighty reigns.***” Then, as John added, “***Let us rejoice and be glad and give glory to him, for the marriage of the Lamb has come and His bride has made herself ready.***”(vss. 6-8).

Let me close this booklet as John closed his great and wonderful revelation: “*He (the Lord Jesus Christ) who testifies these things says, “Yes, I am coming quickly.” Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus.*” (Rev. 22:20).