

Evidence of Our Lord's Return (I)

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The prospect of the return of our Lord upon the clouds of heaven arouses more than a passing interest in the hearts of the children of God. Joy fills our hearts as we contemplate the promise of Jesus Christ, "Let not your heart be troubled: ... In my Father's house are many mansions... I go to prepare a place for you... I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am there ye may be also." John 14:1-3.

The glorious return of Christ may not be spiritualized as the modernist would have us do. You realize that many deny the historicity and infallibility of Scripture. To such the resurrection and return of Christ are myths that have to be interpreted in a "spiritual" way. They scoff at the bodily resurrection of Christ and likewise contend that the return of Christ is not going to be a process of development in which the whole human race will become more "Christlike." Even as the resurrection of Christ is spiritualized as a revival of interest in brotherly kindness, so they spiritualize the return of Christ as a universal acceptance of this kindness and peace.

This we deny emphatically on the basis of the Word of God. We look forward to the day when Christ shall return personally upon the clouds of heaven. In this return He will immediately raise the dead and translate the bodies of the living to ones fit for an eternal abode. John 5:28, 29 and Daniel 12:2. There will be no rapture in which the church will be taken out of this world and spared the great tribulation. There will be no interlude of seven years after which the kingdom will be established in a Jerusalem of which Christ will be King and reign for a millennium. These conceptions are the empty dreams of a fertile imagination. When Christ returns at the end of the ages He will come once and will bring all creatures into judgment, thus opening the way for the casting out of the wicked into the everlasting misery of hell and the formation of the new heavens and earth for the children of God.

In His return, Christ will receive us unto Himself in the Father's house of many mansions. This is our joyful hope.

The Signs of the Times

Jesus' disciples came to Him and asked, "When shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?" (Matt. 24:3). In answering this question, Jesus reminded His disciples that He would establish His kingdom in the way of judgment. He was going to leave them in order that He might go to the cross and earn the right to establish His kingdom by atoning for the sins of His elect and satisfying God's righteous judgment. Nevertheless, He was going to come again unto them and realize His promised kingdom. The establishment of this kingdom would involve the gathering of the church of all ages for whom He was about to die and the casting out of the wicked world in judgment. To make this clear to His disciples, Jesus directed them to an actual historical event that would prefigure the end of the world. This was the destruction of Jerusalem which occurred in A.D. 70 when Rome plundered Jerusalem. This explains the reference Christ makes to "them that are with child and give suck in those days! But pray that your flight be not in the winter, neither on the sabbath day." Matt. 24:16-21.

Ultimately however, the signs of the times referred to in this section point us to the end of the world when Christ will come again to establish His heavenly kingdom that will continue forever.

With this in mind we must be careful to understand what is meant by the "signs of the times."

First, these signs are real events that occur in history. They are not some extra-sensory perceptions that one may receive in a dream or mysterious apparition and thus learn certain secrets that are not common to mankind. There are those that claim that God has given them a special revelation by which they and they alone know the secret of His coming, when and how it will take place. Beware of all such claims! The signs are actual events in history for all to see and observe. Take for example the sign of wars and rumors of wars, (Matt. 24:6) this is a sign for all who have eyes and spiritual knowledge to discern.

Secondly, it follows from this that these signs themselves produce the Christ. Throughout all history, Christ is coming. He came to the disciples in a special way at Pentecost, He comes to the church through the preaching of the gospel, He comes to each of us at death, He shall come personally when all things are accomplished. Christ is busy gathering His church unto Himself. At the same time, the world is becoming increasingly wicked and their measure of iniquity is being filled. They are soon ripe for judgment. Thus, the unfolding of the signs accomplishes God's purpose with all things. This is clearly seen in the sign of the preaching of the gospel to all nations, Matt. 24:14 and Rev. 6:2.

Finally the signs of His coming are definitely designated for us in the Scriptures. We may not go around inventing signs, we must study the Word of God in which God in Christ specifies what things indicate to us the nearness of the end. In answering the questions of the disciples, Christ gave them certain guide lines by which they would be able to discern the times and seasons. We have these presented in the Old Testament as for example Daniel, by Christ Himself in the New Testament, and also in the epistles e.g. II Thess. and especially the Book of Revelation. By comparing Scripture with what things must happen before 'Christ shall return and that when these occur, we may know that our Lord cometh. "When these things begin to come to pass, then look up and lift up your heads, for your redemption draweth nigh." Luke 21:28.

Current Events and the Signs

By studying the Bible we learn that there are three specific areas within which these signs are unfolded. These are in nature, among the nations, and within the church. We will look at each of these briefly.

As the return of Christ draws nearer there will be an increase in natural disturbances. Christ in Matt. 24:7 tells us, "There shall be famines and pestilences, and earthquakes in divers places, All these are the beginning of sorrows." If we add to this the knowledge we receive from the Book of Revelation we may conclude that what is true of all ages becomes greater toward the end of the world. In Revelation, chapters 4-6, we have a description of the seven seals. There is a book in the hands of the Almighty. This book represents the counsel of God which must be unfolded in history. This book has seven seals which must be broken if its contents are to be revealed. The 7th seal becomes seven trumpets and the seventh trumpet becomes seven vials. Some of these seals speak of natural disturbances e.g. the fourth which is pale (6:7, 8) its rider has power, "to kill with the sword, with hunger and death, and with the beasts of the earth." Likewise for the trumpets, (chapters 8, 9) a curse is cast upon the earth, sea, and air. The same is true of the vials (chapter 16) in which destruction is brought upon the earth. The point is that with the seals, only one fourth of the earth's population is affected, with the trumpets one third is killed, and with the vials there is total destruction. It is obvious to conclude from this that as the end comes closer, we may expect an increase of destruction and death caused by natural calamities. This will end in the final cataclysm and total destruction when Christ returns. Then the sun shall be darkened and the moon shall not give her light (Matt. 24:29), and the heavens shall depart as a scroll when it is rolled together and every mountain and island shall be moved out of their places. Rev. 6:14. Anyone engaged in agriculture is well aware of the increased difficulties in raising crops. The extremes of late and early frost combined with drought in some areas and floods in others contribute to food shortages throughout the world. Diseases in plants and an abundance of insects that destroy the fruit of the earth are evident on every hand. A casual observer of the daily news can't help but impress upon us the extent of natural upheavals in our day. Earthquakes, tornadoes, blizzards, landslides pervade the headlines daily. He that hath ears to hear discerns in these signs the call of our Lord, "Behold I come quickly."

The second are lies within the sphere of the nations. According to Scripture, just prior to the return of Christ the nations of the world will be joined together in one world government called the Kingdom of anti-Christ. The kingdom is presented to us in the Old Testament in the image of Nebuchadnezzar, Daniel 2. Paul speaks of the anti-Christ as the man of sin or the son of perdition in II Thess. 2:3. This kingdom is also pictured for us in the Book of Revelation chapter 13. Upon the evidence of the portions of Scripture and elsewhere, we may conclude that the nominally Christian nations of the world will succeed in bringing world peace for a brief duration. These nations, such as the countries of Asia Minor, Europe, and America have been the leaders throughout the history of the world. They have been plagued by wars for generations even as the Sovereign God works out his purpose in having confused the language at Babel, enabling the church to be gathered in the midst of the nations. This wound will be healed (Rev. 13:3) indicating that war will be no more, instead there will be a brief period of ungodly prosperity. In the midst of this prosperity the true church will bear the brunt of the enmity of the anti-Christ against the church.

There will be tribulation for the children of God (Matt. 24:9, 10) even the institute church will be destroyed. Rev. 11:7, 8.

Is there not an abundance of evidence that points to world unity today? Surely the wars and rumors of wars are the birth pangs to bring forth the world government of anti-Christ. Today the world is more united than ever before. All this indicates that the establishment of the world kingdom is very near.