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The Second Coming of Jesus

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Introduction

The second coming of Jesus is a cardinal doctrine of Scripture, appearing already in the OT . The “day of the Lord” was to be a dark day for the wicked, but a day of joy for those who love His appearing (Isa. 35:4). However, a full understanding of the Second Advent would only follow Christ’s first advent.

Jesus Himself foretold His return (Luke 21:27 ; John 14:1–4) and this promise was confirmed by the angels who ministered to the sorrowing disciples as Christ ascended to heaven (Acts 1:11). That Christ would “appear a second time ... to save those who are eagerly waiting for him” (Heb. 9:28) was the “blessed hope” of Paul and early Christian believers (Titus 2:13).

Although the precise moment of the Advent is not known (Matt. 24:36), Christ set forth signs that point to His coming (verses 3–33). In preparation for this climactic event, when Christ shall “repay every one for what he has done” (Rev. 22:12), Christians are advised to watch and pray that they may be able “to stand before the Son of man” in that day (Luke 21:36).

The Second Coming finds its place in the name “Seventh-day Adventist.” The pioneers felt that belief in Christ’s second coming was sufficiently important to warrant a place in the name of the “little flock” when it became a church in 1860. Today God’s people on earth eagerly await Jesus’ return to earth, along with prophets and apostles and many faithful throughout the centuries.

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I. The Second Coming in Scripture

The theme of Christ's second coming recurs in both the Old and New Testaments.

A. OT Terminology

For OT authors, just as God delivered His people from Egypt, He would set them free from this world's bondage on the "day of the Lord" (Isa. 13:6 , 9 ; Eze. 13:5).

1. The Day of Yahweh

The central theme of OT eschatology (doctrine of the *eschaton*, "the end") is the coming of Yahweh (Andreasen 31–45). The prophets frequently speak of "that day" (Zech. 14:9), about "those days" (Joel 2:29), or, like Daniel, about a "time" when salvation would take place (Dan. 12:1). The "day of Yahweh" is awaited as a decisive event of history, with changes on both the sociopolitical and cosmic level. The coming of Yahweh would initiate a new creation. Because He is the Creator, Yahweh is also the master of history, and the One who will bring it to its end (Amos 4:13 ; cf. Rev. 14:6 , 7).

The disasters that follow one another and the deplorable moral condition of Israel and the nations call for God's intervention. But the end does not come as a consequence of political, social, or moral evil. It occurs because God comes. The tragedy lies in the apathy of the nations, which continue in their ways, not taking this coming into account. The prophets urge Israel and the nations to "seek the Lord" (Zeph. 2:1–3), for without preparation they would not be able to stand in the presence of the holiness of Yahweh. Amos summarizes the prophets' cry when he says, "prepare to meet your God, O Israel" (Amos 4:12).

a. A historical event. The coming of Yahweh cannot be separated from history. It is not a coming beyond time, but an irruption of God in history. The present historical events convey meaning, announcing a great theophany (manifestation of God). This can be compared with the enthronement of a sovereign who has vanquished his enemies.

This coming is already perceptible as God comes close to His children when they worship Him (Ex. 20:24). He enters His holy temple and His worshipers celebrate His presence (Ps. 24:7–10).

God also comes in the events of history in order to deliver or to punish His people. This coming is both happy (Isa. 35:4) and terrible (Amos 5:18–20).

God can also come through His anointed Shiloh (Gen. 49:10 , KJV), “the Prince of Peace” (Isa. 9:6), the One who bears the Spirit in His fullness (11:2), and who will rule with Yahweh’s majesty and strength (Micah 5:1–3).

God comes finally to accomplish the promise of the eschaton. All the other comings are guarantees of the ultimate Advent. He comes at “the end of the days” (*bf’ahrit hayyāmim*) in order to show His royalty with power and to renew all things for the happiness of those who have expected Him (Isa. 2:1–4 ; Hosea 3:5 ; Micah 4:1–4).

b.A climactic event.— The ultimate coming of Yahweh is announced as climactic and without appeal. The prophets present it as “a day of darkness and gloom” (Joel 2:2 ; Amos 5:18 ; Zeph. 1:15), a day of anger and wrath (Zeph. 1:18 ; 2:2), “a day of distress and anguish” (1:15), a “day of vengeance” (Isa. 34:8 ; Jer. 46:10), of retribution (Hosea 9:7), and of punishment (Isa. 10:3).

The disasters experienced by Israel and the nations are summarized in Jeremiah’s trilogy as sword, famine, and pestilence (Jer. 14:12), interim tokens of the final judgment, anticipating the final day of Yahweh, which will burn like an oven (Mal. 4:1–3). The final day is not a local event from which one may escape, because the whole earth is affected by the coming of Yahweh (Isa. 2:12–19 ; Zeph. 3:8 ; Mal. 4:1). Every person must face God’s judgment (Amos 5:18–20).

c.A judgment day. The prophets stress the ethical content of Yahweh’s coming. The Lord Almighty comes to judge His people and the nations. He comes to condemn unfaithfulness toward His law, which has been treated with contempt, and to reestablish justice. Adultery, rape, oppression, lies, and violence deserve their penalty (Amos 2:7 ; Mal. 3:5). Even in the practice of religion, scorn and pride appear (Mal. 1:6–14 ; 3:7–9). God will repay all according to their deeds (Isa. 59:18), and all the evildoers will burn like stubble on the coming day (Mal. 4:1).

But if Yahweh is the holy God who punishes sin, He is also the God of mercy who forgives and saves (Ex. 20:5 , 6 ; Isa. 6:6 , 7). Those who have repented and entered into His covenant (Jer. 31:31–34) will receive salvation (Isa. 59:20 ; Jer. 26:13 ; Eze. 18:31 , 32). A remnant will be saved.

2.The Choice of a Remnant

The idea of a remnant suggests terrifying events that destroy everything, leaving only a residue. Amos describes the remnant as “two legs” and “a piece of an ear” rescued “from the mouth of the lion” (3:12), “a brand plucked out of the burning” (4:11). For Isaiah, there are only two or three berries on the “olive tree after it has been shaken (17:5 , 6). Gerhard Hasel has shown that this theme is linked to the account of the Flood (1980:

374, 375). The remnant is found again in Jesus' eschatological speech (Matt. 24:37–41) in connection with the Flood and with the end of the world.

From this small remnant, from the stump of the felled tree (Isa. 6:13) a new humanity will appear. By giving his son the name of Shearjashub, Isaiah expresses the notion that *only* a remnant will be saved, those who remain faithful to Yahweh's covenant (7:3 ; 10:21).

The prophets emphasize that the remnant will be formed only in part by Israel (Amos 9:12). It will also include other nations (Isa. 56:6 , 7). The election of the remnant lies not so much in its own righteousness as in God's faithfulness. God's grace produces a new community through His covenant. It is not the result of a long historical ripening process, but of God's breaking into history (Hasel 1980:396; see Remnant/Three Angels I-IV).

3.The Establishment of a Kingdom

The eschatological hope of Israel focused upon the restoration of a kingdom which would stand forever and never be destroyed (Dan. 2:44). This would be the kingdom of the Davidic Messiah according to the promise (2 Sam. 7:12–16).

This kingdom is presented in two contrasting ways. On one hand it rises modestly, as the charismatic kings whose common features are enhanced by an almost unexpected birth, but who then go on to obtain a great victory through faith. Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Samson, and Samuel received the fruits of faith by experiencing victory over weakness through faith. Cases of obscure and modest origin appear in the stories of Gideon, Jephthah, Saul, and even David (Micah 5:1 , 2) all born of families of little influence. Power came to these saints not because of their own personal might but because God's spirit rested upon them (Zech. 4:6). This was to be the fate of the shoot that came forth from the dry stump, as announced in Isaiah 11:1 , 2 and 53:2 .

Beyond the kingdoms foretold we come to the reign of the Son of man. Of a radically superior nature, this kingdom already is suggested in Daniel 2:44 , 45 , but clearly defined in Daniel 7:13 . The one coming with the clouds of heaven is none other than a divine figure (cf. Eze. 1:4 ; 10:3 , 4). Jewish nationalism is surpassed by a universal and transcendental perspective. The kingdom comes from above, together with the one riding upon the clouds of heaven.

4.The Return to Paradise

After the Babylonian captivity, the culmination of alienation, would come a great return, both of God and of His people. It is presented as almost Paradise, when communion with God would be perfect.

Isaiah and Ezekiel clearly announce a reestablishment of Edenic conditions (Isa. 51:3 ; Eze. 36:35). Showers will fall in season (Eze. 34:26 ; Joel 2:23), and the fields will

produce abundantly (Isa. 30:23 ; Eze. 34:27 ; Joel 3:18 ; Amos 9:13 ; Zech. 8:12). Life expectancy will be uncommonly long (Isa. 65:20), and there will be peace among animals (Isa. 11:6–8) and humans (Isa. 2:4 ; Micah 4:3 , 4). God Himself, like a shepherd, will care for His flock (Isa. 40:11) and reign over Zion (Isa. 52:7). Evil will disappear. Prompted by a new spirit, the people of God faithfully will follow divine instruction (Eze. 36:25–27). The first love will be reestablished (Hosea 2:16–20).

5. Apocalypticism

This new age does not grow out of the old. It is a new creation. The present age is under the control of evil; salvation must come from outside.

Thus, the prophet Daniel describes history from God's point of view (Dan. 2). Interpreting Nebuchadnezzar's dream of the metal image, he announces the succession of world empires and the cataclysmic manner in which the end will come. Beginning with the neo-Babylonian Empire (605-539B.C.), he foresees the Medo-Persian (539-331B.C.), the Hellenistic (331-168B.C.), and the Roman Empires (168B.C.-A.D.476) that follow one another. No other empire succeeds Rome, but different nations occupy its territory. Finally, after the period of the divided nations, a kingdom represented by a stone is set up by God. It pulverizes all the former kingdoms, and stands forever (Dan. 2:36–45). Jesus Christ identified this stone with Himself (Luke 20:17 , 18).

Anxious about the spiritual implications of such a narrative, the prophet was informed that evil would abound. In related visions in Daniel 7 and 8 , the same world empires are represented by terrible animals, which devour, break in pieces, and speak great things (Dan. 7:4–8). An ultimate outgrowth of the last animal, a horn, extends its action over the religious world, oppressing the saints and thinking to change times and laws (verses 23–25). It casts truth down to the ground (Dan. 8:9–12). Here Daniel foretells the way the Papacy, spiritual Rome, would take up political power and act through the centuries.

Such oppression calls for a judgment (Dan. 7), which is pronounced against the arrogant horn. So the universal authority of the Son of man is established.

The starting point of this judgment is given: after 2300 days. According to the year-day principle, this would be after 2300 years (Shea 56–88; Schwantes 462–474). The terminal point seems far away, but it is in harmony with the visions of chapters 2 and 7 , which locate God's intervention as following the evil activities of the last power. A careful study of the links between this prophecy and the 70 weeks of Daniel 9 leads to the establishment of the date of 1844 as the starting point for the pre-Advent judgment. (See Hasel 1986:378–461; see Judgment III. B. 1. a ; Sanctuary III. C. 2. a ; Remnant/Three Angels V. B.)

This pre-Advent judgment is implicit in Jesus' statements about the end of the world. When the end comes, the sheep and the goats already have been identified (Matt. 25:32 , 33); so have the tares and the wheat (13:30). In the OT , as in the New, there is no final decision without careful inquiry (Job 10:6 ; cf. Gen. 6:5 , 12 ; Deut. 17:4 ; 19:18).

These are, in brief summary, the trends in OT thought about the eschatological expectation. They shape the framework for hope in the NT .

B.NT Terminology

The NT has retained various forms of OT statements concerning the “day of the Lord,” applied in particular to the second coming of Christ. For this reason Jesus refers to His return using terms such as “on that day” (Matt. 7:22) and “of those days” (24:19). It will be “the last day” (John 6:39) and a “day of judgment” (Matt. 10:15). The apostle Paul recognizes it as “the day of wrath” (Rom. 2:5) and “the day of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Cor. 1:8). The apostle Peter calls it “the day of God” (2 Peter 3:12).

The vocabulary of the NT on this topic is more varied than that of the OT . In order to speak about the last day of history, the day when Christ will come, the NT employs the Greek words *parousia*, *epiphaneia*, and *apokalypsis*. These words underline the transcendental aspect of the Messiah’s second coming. (See Fagal 46–64.)

1.The Parousia

In the Hellenistic world, *parousia* had a double connotation. It meant both a presence and an arrival which filled up an absence. The word was also used for the epiphany of a god. Christians appropriated the term and filled it with fresh meaning.

The NT characterizes the advent of Christ in various ways. Paul uses the expression “the day of the Lord” as equivalent to *parousia* (1 Thess. 4:15 ; 5:2). Peter uses both terms together when he speaks about “the *parousia* of the day of the Lord” (2 Peter 3:12). Thus, *parousia* becomes an eschatological term linked to the “day of Yahweh” in the OT .

Parousia also evokes the royal character of the event. The emphatic use of the title *Kyrios* (Lord), in connection with the *Parousia*, belongs to the imperial protocol (1 Thess. 4:16 , 17). In that connection one finds references to the crown, to the joy (2:19), and to the gathering of the faithful, who go out to meet the royal procession (4:17). The royal connotation of this word continues in the NT : the *Parousia* will destroy all principalities and hostile powers, including Satan, the evil one, and death itself. After all enemies are annihilated, all things will be submitted to Christ (1 Cor. 15:24–26). In the NT the *Parousia* is a glorious and regal manifestation of Christ.

2.The Epiphany

The verb *epiphainō* (to show, to appear) and its related noun *epiphaneia* (appearance, revelation) occur infrequently in the NT . They have rich meanings, which help us to understand how the first Christians viewed the second coming of Christ. Two of the four uses of the verb refer to light shining in darkness (Luke 1:79 ; Acts 27:20). The other two underline the visible, perceptible character of God’s grace and love in the person of Jesus Christ at the time of His first coming (Titus 2:11 ; 3:4).

The noun is employed in the Pastoral Epistles to characterize both the appearances of Christ before Pentecost (2 Tim. 1:10), and at His second coming at the end of time (1 Tim. 6:14). Thus, these words speak of Christ's incarnation, of His appearance at the resurrection, and of the Second Coming. This threefold use focused the faith of the early church upon the visible nature of Christ's second coming.

The context of the use of *epiphaneia* in 2 Timothy 4:1 , 8 , underlines the imminent eschatological character of the expectation. In the form of a confession of faith, Christ's appearance is coupled with the last judgment. The associations of *elpis* (hope), *epiphaneia* (manifestation), and *doxa* (glory) in Titus 2:13 emphasizes the expectation of a visible event. When the announcement of the appearance of the lawless one just before Christ's second coming (2 Thess. 2:8) is added to these testimonies, the word *epiphaneia* is seen as stressing the visible nature of the appearance of Christ at the end of time.

3.The Apocalypse

The term *apocalypsis* (revelation, apocalypse) is employed in the NT to show that something that was previously hidden now is revealed. The word is used for the mystery of salvation (Rom. 16:25), the gospel (Gal. 1:12), and a plan to be followed (2:2).

The term refers also to a manifestation. This sense is evident wherever the word designates the glorious second advent of Jesus Christ from heaven. Christ's glory is still hidden (Luke 17:30). It is perceived only by the eyes of faith (Eph. 1:17 , 19), but it will be manifested one day (Acts 3:21). The One who is to come will return. He will descend from heaven in His glory (2 Thess. 1:7 ; 1 Peter 4:13). Believers live in expectation of that day (1Co. 1:7 ; 1 Peter 1:7).

C. The Center of Hope

This examination of the vocabulary and major themes of the Old and New Testaments concerning the end of the world has shown that the hope of God's coming in the OT and of Jesus Christ's return in the NT represent the culmination of all biblical eschatology.

1.The Hope

A deep yearning for the second coming of Jesus is present everywhere in the NT . It is related to hope for righteousness (Gal. 5:5), glory (Col. 1:27), resurrection (Acts 24:15), salvation (1 Thess. 5:8), and eternal life (Titus 1:2). It is based on God Himself (1 Tim. 4:10). Jesus promises to come again (John 14:3 , 28). He announces His glory (Matt. 24:30) and pledges not to be the unrighteous judge who ignores those who cry to Him day and night (Luke 18:6–8). The endurance of those who trust Him to the end will not be in vain (Matt. 10:22).

However, the “blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ” (Titus 2:13) should not be confused with ordinary human hope. Hope, in the common sense of the word, is an aspiration, a wish for the future. It desires something not presently in hand, of uncertain possession.

Biblical hope, on the other hand, has a sure anchor (Heb. 6:19). It lies in the mighty deeds of God in the past: God has delivered His people from Egypt; Jesus Christ “came to his own” (John 1:11), died for our sins and was resurrected for our justification (Rom. 4:25). Biblical hope stands on this rock, which is the power of God “accomplished in Christ when he raised him from the dead and made him sit at his right hand in the heavenly places,” above all earthly powers (Eph. 1:20 , 21). This is a living hope based upon the present sovereignty of Jesus, who has been made Lord and Christ (Acts 2:36). He has become “a forerunner on our behalf” in the heavenly sanctuary (Heb. 6:19 , 20).

Christian hope is based upon something already accomplished, to which Christ Himself witnesses (1 Cor. 15:19 , 20). Through the Holy Spirit (Rom. 5:5) the God of hope calls the chosen (Eph. 1:18) and fills their hearts with hope (Col. 1:27). Without God there would be nothing for which to hope (Eph. 2:12); with God, hope strengthens faith and mobilizes love (Col. 1:4 , 5).

2. Maranatha

Eschatological hope always has been dear to the heart of Christians. The persistence of the ancient Aramaic formula *marana tha* (1 Cor. 16:22) in church tradition testifies to this fact. This prayer that “our Lord will come” has been kept in its original form, like the prayer pronounced in Aramaic by Jesus (*abba*, “Father,” Mark 14:35). *Marana tha* is translated into Greek in Revelation 22:20 .

The importance of this prayer in the early church worship service shows how much the church lived in expectation of the Second Coming. That return was also anticipated in the Communion service: the apostle Paul said that partaking of the Communion bread and cup constituted a proclamation of faith in the coming of the Lord (1 Cor. 11:26). In both expectation and announcement the Second Advent found its place at the very heart of the early church liturgy.

3. Thanksgivings

Thanksgiving also occupied an important place in the early church liturgy, particularly the Communion service. The apostle Paul used thanksgivings as introductions to his letters to the churches. A thanksgiving contained the elements of faith common to all those who pronounced it. When the apostle appealed to the churches, he wrote about the giving of thanks, to which his readers could say “Amen.”

Most thanksgivings end with a reference to the Second Advent (1 Cor. 1:7 ; Eph. 1:10 ; Phil. 1:6 ; 1 Thess. 1:10 ; 2 Thess. 1:7–10 ; cf. also 1 Peter 1:5). The reference to the Second Coming in the thanksgiving formula demonstrates how the hope of the

Second Advent lay at the very heart of faith and worship in the apostolic church. For the church, the present “coming” of Jesus to His own through His Holy Spirit constituted the pledge of the heritage to come (Eph. 1:13 , 14). The coming of the Spirit was not the final promise; the Son of man was still to come in the clouds of heaven.

4.The Son of Man

Jesus often applied the title “Son of man” to Himself. The term is derived from Daniel 7:13 , where the Son of man appears as an eschatological being, endowed with the divine attributes and fulfilling royal Messianic power (Ferch 174). This is confirmed by mention of the cloud upon which He travels and the power to judge attributed to Him (Dan. 7:13 , 14).

The title “Son of man,” which Jesus adopted for Himself, helps explain the Parousia. By employing this title, Jesus announced His identity; the formula expresses a concrete aspect of His earthly existence. In the same way He clearly indicated how and why He will return. First, the One who must come is the One who has come; the resurrected Christ is recognized by His human characteristics (Luke 24:30 , 31 , 41–43 ; John 20:20 , 27). Second, He was carried up into glory by a cloud (Acts 1:9), and on a glorious cloud He will return (Rev. 1:7). Fulfilling the functions mentioned in Daniel 7 , He is coming to judge the world (Matt. 25:31–33). Finally, because of well-recognized links between Daniel 2 and 7 , His coming must occur at the end of this world’s history. Jesus identified Himself as the stone that causes the symbolic image of this world’s kingdoms to be shattered (Dan. 2:34 ; Luke 20:18). With the coming of the Son of man in glory the kingdom of God is finally and forever established (Matt. 25:31).

D.The Kingdom of God

The announcement of the kingdom of God deserves a special place, for the hope of the kingdom occupies a central place in OT eschatology. If Yahweh is the One who rules over the earth and the nations (Ps. 29 ; 47 ; 74 ; 89 ; 93 ; 96–99), His eternal kingdom is also expected (Dan. 2:34 , 44), and it will be established on Yahweh’s great day (Zech. 14:9 ; Obadiah 15 , 21 ; Isa. 2:12–21 ; 24:21–23). Long before the Davidic monarchy, the kingdom of God was celebrated in song (Ex. 15:1–18 ; Num. 23:21 , 22 ; Deut. 33:5). In Jesus’ teaching the NT gives to the kingdom an even more important role.

1.A Transcendental Kingdom

The Gospel writers mention more than 100 references to the kingdom in Jesus’ teaching (see, for example, Mark 1:15 ; Luke 9:60 ; 22:18). In Matthew Jesus spoke especially about the kingdom of *heaven* (32 times; cf. Matt. 3:2 ; 7:21 ; 8:11). This special feature of Matthew has sometimes been ascribed to the writer’s concern for the sensitivities of his Jewish readers, who may have been shocked by the frequent use of God’s name. However, Matthew’s preference for the term seems to be based more upon theological than psychological concerns.

In Jesus' time the Jews were expecting a Messiah and an earthly kingdom. Even after the resurrection, the apostles were still waiting for the reestablishment of earthly Israel (Acts 1:6). By way of contrast, Matthew's emphasis upon the kingdom of heaven stresses its transcendental nature, its heavenly—rather than earthly—origin. John goes even further than Matthew and Mark by giving an account of Jesus' words before Pilate: "My kingship is not of this world" (John 18:36).

Jesus does not announce a kingdom to be established progressively as a result of human efforts, even those sanctified by the Spirit. His kingdom is of a nature different from the kingdoms of this world: it is a future kingdom, to be established when the Son of man comes at the Parousia (2 Tim. 4:1). This is what Jesus teaches in the parable of the sower. The kingdom of heaven, He says, may be compared to a man who sowed good seed. This sower is the Son of man and this kingdom is the kingdom of God (Matt. 13:24–30). The Son of man must come from heaven with His kingdom (16:28). For this reason Jesus invited His disciples to pray, "Thy kingdom come" (6:10).

2.A Mysterious Kingdom

Jesus pointed out that the kingdom was already present in the midst of the disciples (Luke 17:20 , 21). Where Jesus is, there His kingdom is as well (Matt. 12:28). Those who are born anew can see it (John 3:3). It is a mystery revealed only to believers (Mark 4:11). It is not the kingdom of glory, but the kingdom of grace, seen now only by faith. In the parable of the mustard seed the kingdom of heaven is minute, no larger than a grain of mustard (Matt. 13:31 , 32).

Some, following the Church Fathers, have used this parable to describe the growth of the church, understood as the kingdom of God. But Jesus is not speaking about growth here. He is contrasting two stages of the kingdom: the seed and the tree. Tiny, weak, and fragile as the kingdom of Christ appears now, one day it will be powerful and glorious. The glory of the righteous will appear then, in the kingdom of the Father (verse 43).

More than any other biblical writer, the apostle Paul emphasized the coming kingdom of glory. Those who enter it experience suffering (Rom. 8:17 ; 2 Thess. 1:5 ; see also 2 Tim. 4:17 , 18). With irony Paul reproved the Corinthians who imagined that through their charismatic experiences they were already in the kingdom of glory, pointing out, instead, the difficulties he still suffered in this world (1 Cor. 4:8 , 9).

For Paul the kingdom presents a paradox. It is a glorious kingdom (Eph. 1:20–22), but one enters it through tribulations (Acts 14:22 ; 2 Thess. 1:4 , 5). The chosen already have been transferred into that kingdom and are sitting in heavenly places with Jesus Christ (Col. 1:13 ; Eph. 2:6). Their lives, however, like the glory of the kingdom, remain hidden. They will not be revealed until Christ appears in His glory (2 Thess. 1:7 ; Col. 3:3 , 4).

Here below, the citizens of the kingdom are not recognized by their enfolding glory, by their oratorical gifts (1 Cor. 2:1 , 4), or by the way they eat and drink, but by their

righteousness, peace, and joy, all produced by the Spirit (Rom. 14:17). In this sense one may speak of a spiritual kingdom that exists when each believer is led by the Spirit.

3.A Spiritual Kingdom

For Paul, the heirs of the kingdom do not practice unrighteousness (1 Cor. 6:9 , 10), but submit themselves to the law of God, of which love is the supreme expression (Gal. 5:16–23).

Jesus affirmed that in order to enter the kingdom one had to be born of the Spirit (John 3:5). Those who have been converted, who have received the baptism of water and the Spirit, are welcome in the kingdom of God. Hence the kingdom is within reach of the poor in Spirit (Matt. 5:3), those who, like children, are ready to be instructed about the kingdom (Mark 10:14). Like the tax collectors and the harlots, they have repented and believed in Jesus (Matt. 21:31 , 32).

Not all who call Jesus Lord will enter the kingdom of God, but only those who do the Father's will (Matt. 7:21–23). The kingdom is ruled by God's law (Matt. 5:17–20), and in order to enter life the observance of the commandments is indispensable (verses 21–43 ; 19:17).

Access to the kingdom is by grace, which is accorded to all (John 3:16), as is the wedding garment (Matt. 22:11). But the guests who refuse the festal garment show that they do not deserve the kingdom (verses 13 , 14). On the other hand, those who experience God's grace cannot but show this same grace, this same love, toward others (Matt. 25:31–46 ; 18:21–35). When the Son of man comes, He will repay each one according to deeds committed (Matt. 16:27 ; see Salvation III. C. 1, 2).

4.A Future Kingdom

As Jesus approached Jerusalem one day He gave a parable to certain people who were expecting the soon coming of the kingdom of God. A nobleman had gone to a foreign country in order to receive royal authority, after which he would return (Luke 19:11 , 12). With this story Jesus was leading them to understand that the kingdom was not to come immediately. Like this king, He also had to leave for a faraway place and come back afterward.

Certain theologians have concluded from this that Jesus' appearances after the Resurrection constituted His second coming. When Jesus left for heaven, however, angels announced to the disciples that they should await His second coming (Acts 1:7–11). Thus the appearance of Christ after His resurrection could not be His second advent.

Since the first century the church has waited for a kingdom to come. As long as death continues to occur, Christ's reign will not be completely established (1 Cor. 15:24–26). According to Peter, unbelievers are wrong in thinking that the promise of the advent of the kingdom is in vain. As certainly as the antediluvian world was annihilated by water,

the postdiluvian world will be destroyed by fire when the Lord comes. Then will be established a new heaven and a new earth, where justice dwells (2 Peter 3:3–13). John recorded the beautiful promise of Jesus: “Let not your hearts be troubled; believe in God, believe also in me.... And when I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also” (John 14:1–3). Only ultimate and total communion with God will put an end to the misery of this world (Rev. 21:1–5).

E.Manner of His Coming

Because the death and resurrection of Jesus guarantee final victory, the authors of the NT declare that we are living at the end of time (Heb. 1:2 ; 9:26 ; 1 Cor. 10:11 ; James 5:3 ; 1 Peter 1:20). Such statements have led certain scholars to believe that the second coming of Jesus would not take place literally but through the presence of His Spirit in the church. Then the coming of Christ’s kingdom would be accomplished through the victory of the moral principles of Christianity.

Christ’s resurrection introduces a new era—the “last days” (Acts 2:17 ; Heb. 1:2). The end has come near because Christ has inaugurated the last period of this world’s history. No longer does time signify delay, but anticipation (2 Peter 3:9); it journeys forward toward the glorious explosion of the Parousia (Rom. 13:11 , 12). Therefore the believer can wait in confidence to be admitted to the promised heavenly dwelling (2 Cor. 5:1–5 ; John 14:1–3).

In this way the NT can affirm in a logical and coherent chain of thought that the second coming of Christ will be:

1. Personal and Literal

The Gospels insist that the Crucified One Himself appeared to the disciples after the Resurrection. Jesus of Nazareth presented Himself to them (Mark 16:9 ; Luke 24:25–43). He invited Thomas, who doubted, to touch His wounds (John 20:26 , 27). Jesus was taken into glory after having proved to His disciples over 40 days that He was actually alive (Acts 1:3).

To the disciples, upset by this new separation, angels announced that *this Jesus* would come back in the same way He had gone to heaven (verse 11). The Son of man had left on a cloud; He would return on the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory, according to His promise (Matt. 26:64 ; Mark 13:26 ; Rev. 1:7).

According to the apostle Paul, “the Lord himself will descend from heaven” (1 Thess. 4:16). The Lord, “who is our life,” will appear (Col. 3:4) in order to give us “the crown of righteousness” (2 Tim. 4:8). We are waiting for Jesus, the Son of God, raised from the dead by His Father, to come from heaven (1 Thess. 1:10). He who offered Himself once “to bear the sins of many” will bring salvation to those who await His coming (Heb. 9:28).

2. Visible and Audible

If the Second Coming is personal, it cannot but be visible. The terms *apokalypsis*, *epiphaneia*, and *parousia*, employed by the NT to describe His return, testify to what Jesus Himself announced: All nations of the earth will see Him (Matt. 24:30). John is more specific: “Every eye will see him” (Rev. 1:7). His return will be accompanied by terrifying cosmic signs impossible to ignore (Luke 21:25–27). Jesus warned His disciples about false prophets who would try to lead them to believe that the Second Coming would be hidden, veiled, mysterious, whereas it will be visible from all points of view. It will be like a flash of lightning rending the clouds (Matt. 24:26 , 27).

Jesus is coming to manifest His glory (Titus 2:13), to be admired by His saints (2 Thess. 1:10). He will appear in a flaming fire, to slay those who do not know God (verses 7 , 8). Any attempt to reduce the second advent of Jesus to an invisible and mysterious event is contrary to the testimony of the whole NT . Jesus’ coming will be public, announced by a loud trumpet, as was the arrival of ancient kings (1 Thess. 4:16 ; Matt. 24:31). There is no secrecy here.

3. Glorious and Triumphant

If the First Coming was one of humiliation, the Second Coming, on the contrary, will take place in glory. Christ will come in the clouds of heaven, with power and glory (Matt. 24:30), accompanied by angels (2 Thess. 1:7). He will return as King of kings and Lord of lords (Rev. 19:16), victorious over all His enemies (1 Cor. 15:25).

The world lives in anguish from uncertainty about the present and future. Theology cannot appease this uneasiness by reducing eschatology to survival after death. Beyond the end of each individual, Scripture has answered the question on the future of history by announcing the second advent of Christ in glory. The Christian’s future is enhanced by the glorious prospect of the Saviour’s second coming, the hope of all Christians (1 Tim. 1:1).

4. Cataclysmic

The end of this world had already been announced in the OT . The NT associates this end with Christ’s second coming (Matt. 13:40 , 41). According to Daniel, the stone cut from the mountain will reduce all the kingdoms of the world to nothing (Dan. 2:44). In the same way that the Flood annihilated the antediluvian world, so the coming of Christ will cause the heavens to “pass away with a loud noise” and the earth to be burned up (2 Peter 3:10). Because God wants to establish “a new heaven and a new earth” (Rev. 21:1), the end of this world as we now know it is not only a worldwide phenomenon, it has cosmic dimensions.

5. Sudden

The transcendental character of the Second Coming is underlined again by its suddenness. Men and women will be taken by surprise. Jesus employed several metaphors to warn the disciples about this: the thief in the night (Matt. 24:42–44 ; Luke 12:40 ; cf. 1 Thess. 5:2 , 4 ; 2 Peter 3:10), the bridegroom and the 10 virgins (Matt. 25:1–13), the Flood and the pre-Flood world (24:38 , 39). The apostle Paul adds to this the figure of labor pains coming upon a pregnant woman (1 Thess. 5:3).

Far from suggesting a secret or invisible Second Coming, these images announce it as breaking upon the scene of action in a sudden and unexpected way. For this reason the disciples were called upon to be watchful (Matt. 25:13 ; 24:42). “You also must be ready,” said Jesus, “for the Son of man is coming at an hour you do not expect” (24:44).

The figures employed by Jesus and Paul do not even mention the time when the Advent will take place: The master of the house does not know when the thief will come; the virgins do not know when the bridegroom will arrive; the woman wonders when the pain will start. No one knows the moment, neither the angels, nor even the Son (Matt. 24:36), but only the Father (Mark 13:32). The disciples are not informed about the precise time (Acts 1:6 , 7; RH Aug. 16, 1887; 1T 72).

However, Jesus has provided signs to herald His coming, not to allow a calculation of the date of the coming, but to sustain the disciples’ attention, to keep them awake (1Thess. 5:4–6). Nobody knows if the master will come in the evening, at midnight, at cockcrow, or in the morning; however, no one should be sleeping when He arrives suddenly (Mark 13:35 , 36) because important events have already announced His coming (Mark 13:28 , 29). It is important to be attentive to these signs.

F. The Signs of the Second Coming

In his study of the Advent hope, Samuele Bacchiocchi has dedicated many pages to the signs of the second coming of Christ (113–262). This is in harmony with the emphasis Christ Himself gave to the signs in His Olivet discourse (Matt. 24 ; Mark 13 ; Luke 21). The believer waiting for the Second Coming finds hope in the signs. As the prophecies were given to strengthen the faith of the disciples (John 13:19 ; 14:29), the signs energize the believers, who recognize with Paul that “salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed; the night is far gone, the day is at hand” (Rom. 13:11 , 12).

The signs were to take place in nature, among nations, and in the hearts of human beings. However, before addressing the signs, certain puzzling verses that have been used to set a time for the Second Coming should be examined.

1. Some Difficult Texts

The misunderstanding of three texts in Matthew has caused some to suggest that Jesus expected a very early time for the Second Coming. Since the Advent did not occur then, the reliability of Scripture is negated. An examination of these passages should clarify the true meaning of the signs in these verses.

a. Matthew 10:23 . “When they persecute you in one town, flee to the next; for truly, I say to you, you will not have gone through all of the towns of Israel, before the Son of man comes.”

This text would seem to indicate that only a short time would elapse before Christ’s return. In an attempt to relate this saying to the delay of nearly 2,000 years, some have suggested that the coming of the Son of man was in reality the resurrection or the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Others have taken this as an expression of the wishes of Matthew’s Christian community.

In Matthew 24 Christ blends the prophecy of the destruction of Jerusalem with the prediction of the end of the world. This apparent merging of the particular with the general is characteristic of many eschatological prophecies. Just as the judgment of the world in the OT is considered against the background of judgments pronounced on Edom (Isa. 34:5–15 ; Jer. 49:7–22) or Assyria (Nahum 3:18 , 19), so in this chapter, the judgment of this world is apparently merged with the judgment of Jerusalem.

In this passage the term Israel seems to have been used not in either a geographical or political sense but rather with reference to people. This passage can be interpreted as a double prediction: the spread of the gospel would take place until the very end of time, and it would be accompanied at times by trouble and persecution. Thus, if Israel is taken as a broad term and disciples are understood as all believers, the process of preaching goes on until the Second Coming, regardless of its date.

b. Matthew 16:28 . “Truly, I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom.”

For the Church Fathers and many scholars through the centuries, Jesus was referring here to the Transfiguration, as indicated by Matthew 17:1 . In Matthew 16:21–28 , Jesus announces His death and sets forth the cost of discipleship for His followers. He then encourages them by affirming the certainty of His glorious victory: some would see His glory in their lifetime. Immediately Matthew notes that the Transfiguration took place only six days later.

That the disciples were eyewitnesses to His majesty is corroborated in 2 Peter 1:16–18 . Certainly the Transfiguration shares certain features with the Second Coming: it occurs in a high place and is accompanied by a bright cloud (Matt. 17:1 , 5 ; 26:64 ; cf. Dan. 7:13).

c. Matthew 24:34 . “Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away till all these things take place.”

The misunderstanding regarding the time of the Second Coming derives from the interpretation of the word “generation.” The word *genea* can refer to descent or the time between the birth of a father and his son. It also refers to an age, a time period. The Greek word corresponds to the Hebrew *dôr*, which is often used to designate a group or class of

people: “a stubborn and rebellious generation” (Ps. 78:8) is not limited to one age group. In Proverbs 30:11–14 (KJV) the beginning word of each verse is *dôr*, “generation”; the RSV correctly translates “there are those who,” for here “generation” refers to a kind of people, not an age group.

In harmony with this OT usage, Jesus would have used the term “this generation” without a temporal meaning, to refer to a class of people. The evil generation would include all who share evil characteristics (Matt. 12:39 ; 16:4 ; Mark 8:38).

If the word “generation” is given a temporal meaning in this passage, care should be taken to respect the time frame given in the context. In Matthew 24:34 Jesus is speaking of final events. Thus, the temporal generation would be that of those living at the end-time, not the one to which Jesus was speaking.

Jesus Himself made it clear that His words were not to be taken as setting a time for His coming. He said, “But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only” (Matt. 24:36). This would not fit with the claim of some that although the day or the hour cannot be known, the year may be ascertained. Nowhere did Jesus suggest a time for His coming, either in His time or in the distant future.

In Mark’s version of Jesus’ prophetic sermon (Mark 13) it is clear that Christ did not expect that all of the prophecy would be fulfilled during the time of the apostles. Jesus said: “The end is not yet” (verse 7); “This is but the beginning of the birth-pangs” (verse 8); “The gospel must first be preached to all nations” (verse 10); “He who endures to the end will be saved” (verse 13). Finally, the elect would be gathered “from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven” (verse 27), suggesting the results of worldwide evangelism.

None of these three texts can be used as a basis for setting the time of the second coming of Christ. Neither can they be considered as evidence that the signs of the Second Coming are not valid. The signs serve as landmarks, assuring us that the historical process is moving toward its intended goal, without a specific calendar for the end. The believer is filled with hope as the signs are fulfilled.

The prophetic signs were given to strengthen the faith of the disciples (John 13:19 ; 14:29), to keep them awake to the importance of the times. Likewise, they keep us alert and aid us in understanding that the end “is nearer to us now than when we first believed” (Rom. 13:11).

2.Signs in the Natural World

“And there will be signs in sun and moon and stars,” Jesus foretold (Luke 21:25); He further specified, “the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken” (Mark 13:24 , 25).

Jesus was not merely announcing future eclipses of the sun and moon. These would not have made good signs because they occur regularly and do not constitute exceptional phenomena. Furthermore, the place these signs occupy in the Olivet sermon should be considered: just after a great tribulation, and just before the appearing of Christ (Mark 13:24–26 ; Matt. 24:29 , 30). These signs were specific, marking the end of the 42 months of persecution, as described in Revelation 12:13–17 and 13:1–10 .

In Revelation 12 and 13 John is referring to Daniel 7–9 , where the prophet sees a horn, a power, coming out from the Roman Empire and speaking against God and His saints. Following a large body of historicist interpreters, Seventh-day Adventists have recognized the Papacy in this political and religious power (4BC 49–54). This power grew slowly from the ruins of the Roman Empire, and received a great impetus about 538, when the siege of Rome was lifted, and the Ostrogoths were subsequently defeated (*ibid.* 834–838). During 12 centuries the pretensions of papal Rome were such that this power persecuted those who disagreed with it. The prophecy of Daniel 7:25 , interpreted by John in Revelation 12:6 , 14 as 1260 prophetic days or 1260 years according to the year-day principle (Shea 56–92), locates the end of the prophetic period in 1798. At that time the effects of the French Revolution resulted in a disruption of the power of the Roman Catholic Church, when General L. A. Berthier took Pope Pius VI into exile. (See PFOF 2:749–782.)

It is understandable, therefore, that those events revived eschatological hope around the world. Three times Daniel places the last judgment immediately after the evil doings of the beast (7:13 , 14 , 21 , 22 , 26). Out of the political and religious upheavals that shook Europe at the end of the eighteenth century, a great awakening arose, and the attention of believers was directed to the signs of the times prophesied. The end of the world seemed to be near, and the signs preceding that event were recognizable.

The appearance of heavenly phenomena would be preceded, according to John, by a great earthquake (Rev. 6:12). The book of Revelation regularly associates earthquakes with the final events (8:5 ; 11:13 , 19 ; 16:18), as if the earth itself were sharing in the anguish of human beings who face the fearful prospect of coming events (Luke 21:25 , 26).

a.Lisbon earthquake. The Lisbon earthquake, which occurred on November 1, 1755, was one of the strongest in recorded history. It was felt in North Africa and several parts of Europe. Combined with a tidal wave, it caused the death of tens of thousands of people. It was recognized at the time as a portent of the end (Smith 439–441).

b.Darkening of the sun. On May 19, 1780, thick darkness covered the northeastern part of the North American continent, remaining until the next morning. Many people believed that the time of judgment had come. Following the dark day, the moon rose blood red. These phenomena can be associated with the celestial signs to accompany John's earthquake: "The sun became black as sackcloth, the full moon became like blood" (Rev. 6:12 ; Smith 441–445).

c. Falling of the stars. In addition to the signs just described, John notes that “the stars of the sky fell to the earth as the fig tree sheds its winter fruit when shaken by a gale” (Rev. 6:13). This part of John’s prophecy was fulfilled on November 13, 1833. That night the sky was crossed by an estimated 60,000 meteors an hour. From Canada to Mexico, from the Atlantic to the Pacific Ocean, the whole of North America was witness to this extraordinary demonstration. Many wondered about the meaning of such an event (PFOF 4:289–300; Smith 439–448).

In and of itself an earthquake or meteor shower may have no more religious meaning than a storm or blizzard. But when these phenomena are notable and occur according to the biblical sequence, at the time foreseen by prophecy, one should heed Jesus’ words: “When these things begin to take place,... your redemption is drawing near” (Luke 21:28).

Seventh-day Adventists have traditionally given particular importance to these signs which appeared in areas where people were studying the Scriptures, more particularly biblical prophecy. Already at that time these portents were taken as God’s signs.

d. Famines. Without including them in a precise chronological order, Jesus also announced that before His coming there would be famines in various places (Matt. 24:7). It may be difficult to recognize famine as a sign because today hunger is so widespread. Famines have always existed. However, the scale of hunger in the late twentieth century is unprecedented. Furthermore, famines are evidence of our inability to solve our problems in spite of our extraordinary scientific achievements. They also attest the egotism and violence that are the roots of most endemic famines.

In the OT famines were considered as God’s judgments upon His people, or upon the heathen nations, because of their rebellion (2 Sam. 24:13 ; Jer. 29:17 , 18 ; Eze. 5:11 , 12). Today we do not judge as guilty the famished populations of the earth. But the hosts of starving people testify that the day of the One who will judge the world is near.

e. Other natural disasters. Jesus did not announce only one earthquake; He foretold many (Matt. 24:7). Famines and earthquakes are only one aspect of the imbalance of our planet. The ecological movement around the world today emphasizes the increasing problems created by human carelessness and greed. It is time for God to judge “the destroyers of the earth” (Rev. 11:18).

3. Signs in the Moral World

The evils of this world are not simply a consequence of natural phenomena. People share an important part in them. Jesus foretold the moral debasement of the human race in His sermon on Olivet, comparing the time of the end with the situation preceding the Flood (Matt. 24:37–39), when “the wickedness of man was great in the earth” (Gen. 6:5). He also compared the end-time with the condition of Sodom prior to its destruction (Luke 17:28–30). Paul describes in detail the moral pollution of the world at the time of the end (2 Tim. 3:1–5). Statistics on the abundance of crime confirm his predictions.

Jesus used two key words to describe the moral state of the world at the eve of His second coming. He said that “because *wickedness* is multiplied, most men’s *love* will grow cold” (Matt. 24:12). “Wickedness” comes from the Greek *anomia*, which more specifically refers to the absence of law, the refusal to recognize the authority of any law and thus to live by one’s own desires and passions. From this lawlessness spring all the deviations in matters of sexuality, food, entertainment, or leisure, which modern people practice in the name of freedom. In contrast, Revelation praises those who in the end-time “keep the commandments of God” (Rev. 12:17 ; 14:12).

The second term used by Jesus in Matthew 24:12 is *agapē*, “love.” Paul gives this word an extended definition in 1 Corinthians 13 . *Agapē* presides over relations with others. Its absence results in family conflicts such as divorce, conflicts between nations (Matt. 24:7), the disruption of societies through exploitation, revolutions, and strikes, as well as the loss of respect for human beings (10:21). A lack of love can take on criminal forms, such as rape, murder, theft, or use of drugs; it also leads to the various ways in which humans exploit one another (cf. James 5:1–6 ; 2T 252; FE 101).

4. Signs in the Religious World

From a religious perspective the time of the end is paradoxical. On one hand the gospel is announced to the whole world (Matt. 24:14). Already in their time, the apostles had pressed toward this goal (Col. 1:6). Now, in the end-time, the gospel proclamation is symbolized by an angel who cries with a loud voice, “Fear God and give him glory, for the hour of his judgment has come” (Rev. 14:6 , 7 ; see Remnant/Three Angels V. A-E). On the other hand, people will attempt to quench their thirst for God’s Word from broken cisterns (Amos 8:13 , 14 ; Jer. 2:13). Jesus pointed out that false christs and false prophets would appear in the end-time (Matt. 24:5 , 11 ; 1SM 15). Among those whom John denounces in special terms is the one called antichrist (1 John 2:18 ; 4:3 ; 2 John 7); that is to say, the one who is opposed to Christ or who takes Christ’s place. In John’s time the antichrist spirit already was recognizable by its rejection of Jesus’ incarnation and divinity (1 John 2:22). This same spirit of falsehood will reappear in the beast of Revelation 13:11–17 . With it, an extreme form of religious oppression and fanaticism will develop, which will put an end to religious freedom by imposing a new idolatry (Rev. 13:14–17) akin to that mandated by Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon (Dan. 3).

The challenge during this period of trouble and delusion is to persevere until the end in order to be saved (Matt. 10:22 ; Rev. 13:10 ; 14:12). For this reason it is important for all believers to be acquainted with both the true and false signs of Christ’s coming. (See Great Controversy V. A-C.)

5. False Signs

Jesus cautioned His disciples that some would perform miracles in His name even though He did not recognize or accept them (Matt. 7:21–23). In His eschatological speech, He warned about the false nature of those miracles and their purpose: “to lead astray, if possible, even the elect” (Matt. 24:24). The apostle Paul indicated that the “man of lawlessness” would appear with “all power, and with pretended signs and wonders” (2 Thess. 2:3–9). Paul describes the coming of the “lawless one” in the same terms used to describe Jesus’ advent: *apokalypsis* (verses 3 , 6 , 8) and *parousia* (verses 8 , 9).

The prophet Elijah called fire from the Lord down upon the altar at Mount Carmel to demonstrate the identity of the true God (1 Kings 18:24 , 38). In the end-time the same miracle will be performed by the power with two horns that look like those of a lamb, but that speaks like a dragon (Rev. 13:11 , 13 ; GC 624). The only means by which to escape such seduction is the love of truth (2 Thess. 2:10 ; RH Sept. 5, 1899).

6.A Mistakenly Interpreted Sign

The dispensationalist school of thought applies the vision of Ezekiel 37 to the state of Israel. Accordingly, the return of Israel to Palestine, its conversion to Jesus Christ, the reestablishment of the Davidic monarchy, and the rebuilding of the Temple serve as signs of the end for this school of thought (Pache 317–350). The secret rapture of the church becomes an important part of this scheme.

This unscriptural teaching about the massive conversion of the people of Israel is most frequently supported by an interpretation of Romans 11:12 , 26 . However, this important chapter is not a prophecy regarding the end-time. Having shown that there is no difference between Jews and Greeks concerning salvation, for all are under the power of sin (Rom. 3:9), Paul expresses his wish for all Israel to be saved. While all, Jews and Greeks alike, are consigned to disobedience, all have equal access to God’s mercy (Rom. 11:32). Paul does not discuss the time of the conversion of the people of Israel; he teaches rather the manner of their gathering: the heathen will come together with the converted Jews, the Israel of God (verse 26 ; cf. Berkouwer 323–358).

It is clear, both in Jesus’ statements (Matt. 24:6–13) and in Revelation 12–14 , that the time preceding the Second Coming will not be a golden age. Rather, it will be a period of trouble and anguish (Luke 21:25 , 26). Because of the wickedness of human beings, true faith will become uncommon (18:8). Moreover, Jesus did not talk about several returns or of several occasions of conversion. He described only one visible, glorious, and mighty coming. At that time the living saints, together with those resurrected, will be taken up in the clouds of heaven to receive their Saviour (1 Thess. 4:16 , 17).s

G. The Reasons for Jesus’ Second Coming

“The final triumph of God is a theological necessity” (Pidoux 53). He is the Almighty, the master of history. He has demonstrated this fully through Jesus Christ. It

would be contrary to His very nature not to accomplish His promise to manifest His glory both to the living and to the dead. Our Lord Jesus comes, therefore, in order to finish the work of redemption of which His resurrection was a guarantee.

His second coming accomplishes seven great purposes:

1.To Gather the Chosen

As the priests blew the trumpet at the time of the great convocations (Num. 10:2), so “with a loud trumpet call” powerful angels assemble the elect from the four winds (Matt. 24:31 ; Mark 13:27). The “gathering” reflects Israelite hope of seeing the Jews of the diaspora gathered again by God, according to His promises (e.g., Deut. 30:3 ; Isa. 43:3–5 ; Eze. 39:27). Having been scattered all over the world in order to witness to Jesus Christ (Acts 1:8), the disciples are once more gathered together.

2.To Resurrect the Dead

Believers who have lost their lives have the glorious privilege of becoming partakers in Jesus’ resurrection (Rom. 6:5 ; Phil. 3:10). His resurrection provides the basis for our hope (1 Peter 1:3 ; 1 Thess. 4:14), it guarantees His promise (John 6:40). If Jesus does not bring the dead to life, the gospel is meaningless and our hope is in vain (1 Cor. 15:14–19). Contrary to popular thinking about spirit-life after death, God’s plan for those who have died in Christ is not complete until the glorious day of the resurrection. Until then, believers rest in unconscious sleep, waiting for the resurrection when they will receive their reward. So Oscar Cullmann could write that “the biblical hope of resurrection does not see the individual’s destiny except as a result of the total work of Christ. That is why the resurrection of our ‘mortal bodies’ (Rom. 8:11) will take place only at the end,” not at each individual’s death (1945, 20).

The trumpet that assembles the elect also wakes the dead (1 Thess. 4:16). They will come out of their graves in a glorious, energized, imperishable condition (1 Cor. 15:42–44 , 53). Then they will exclaim with the apostle, “O death, where is thy victory? O death, where is +thy sting?” (verse 55). The righteous dead will come to life as witnesses of God’s might (6:14 ; see Resurrection I, II).

3.To Transform and Receive All the Saints

The living righteous will retain a physical human body, although not in its present state. They will be transformed (Phil. 3:21), in the twinkling of an eye (1 Cor. 15:51 , 52), because the perishable cannot inherit the imperishable (verse 50). God wants to save His faithful people of all time. Together with those who are alive, the resurrected saints will be caught up in the air to form a joyous procession to acclaim their Lord (1 Thess. 4:17).

4.To Destroy the Evil Powers and the Wicked

Jesus will also come to put an end to this world's suffering by destroying those who cause it. Thus, He answers the prayer of the martyrs who exclaimed, "O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before thou wilt judge and avenge our blood?" (Rev. 6:10).

The wicked will not be able to endure His dazzling presence. They pronounce their own condemnation (verse 16). All the evil powers are destroyed: the wicked (2 Thess. 2:8), those symbolically called Babylon (Rev. 18:8 ; 19:2), the beast and the false prophet (verse 20), and all those who accompany them (verse 21). Following the millennium Satan himself will be consumed (Rev. 20:10 ; see Millennium I. C. 1, 3).

5.To Vindicate God

The problem of evil is not completely resolved with the destruction of its author. Throughout history, God's love has been questioned, hence the need for His vindication. At Christ's second coming, however, the wicked were destroyed by the brightness of His presence. This suggests that the post-millennial judgment does not aim at establishing the innocence of some and the guilt of others (Rev. 20:4–6 , 11–15). Rather it vindicates God and His dealings with humanity (Eph. 3:10 , 11). This vindication consists in God's reconciling the world to Himself through Christ (2 Cor. 5:19). Because all things proceed from Him, the glory belongs to Him. It is to demonstrate finally God's love, mercy, justice, and vindication to the whole universe that the wicked are resurrected after the millennium. (See Judgment III. B. 3.)

6.To Restore the Earth

Nature has been subjected to the curse of sin and longs for renewal (Rom. 8:19–21). The elect will not need to restore the ruins or erase the traces of a corrupt civilization. According to His promises, God will create a new heaven and a new earth (Isa. 65:17 ; 66:22 ; 2 Peter 3:13 ; Rev. 21:1). In that ideal setting the redeemed will acknowledge the grand accomplishments of the entire plan of salvation. (See New Earth I-III.)

7.To Reestablish Communion With God

Nothing is dearer to the heart of God than to reconcile all things to Himself through Jesus Christ (Col. 1:19 , 20 ; 2 Cor. 5:20 ; Eph. 1:9 , 10). Now communion between God and man has been interrupted by sin (Isa. 59:2). Then God will be able to dwell with His own (Rev. 21:3), and the redeemed will be with the Lord forever (1 Thess. 4:17).

All these reasons for Jesus' second coming imply a preliminary judgment that has taken place before that coming (Dan. 7:9–14). Many NT references concerning the end of time indicate that Jesus will return to pass sentence, not to initiate court hearings (Matt. 3:12 ; 8:11 , 12 ; 13:30 ; 24:37–41). This is particularly clear in the parables of Matthew 25 , which presuppose a time of preliminary inquiry into the way human beings have employed their waiting time. At Jesus' second coming the apostle Paul expects his reward, not an examination of his case. At that time he will receive "the crown of

righteousness” (2 Tim. 4:8). “Behold, I am coming soon, bringing my recompense, to repay every one for what he has done” says Jesus (Rev. 22:12 ; see Judgment III. B. 1).

II. Implications of the Doctrine

Belief in the Second Coming influences Christians’ lives in many ways. Not only does one’s way of daily life reflect a belief, but motivation for witnessing and making spiritual preparation for that day, regardless of the apparent delay.

A. Effects on the Believer’s Daily Life

Eschatological expectation often is considered by its detractors as immobilizing, leading Christians to pessimism about the world, uninterested in the affairs of life. It is true that setting a date for the Second Coming has led to extreme attitudes. Apparently, in the time of the apostle Paul, certain people had given up work because of this (1 Thess. 4:11 ; 2 Thess. 3:10–12). Others had given up conjugal relations to devote themselves to prayer (1 Cor. 7:3–5) or thought of divorcing a spouse, better to prepare for the Parousia (verse 10).

However, far from reducing Christians to isolated islands, the hope of the Second Advent actually reminds them of their mission as salt of the earth and light of the world (Matt. 5:13–16). When the Master returns, He will find His faithful servants giving His people their needed nourishment (Matt. 24:45 , 46). Even in the management of wealth they will glorify their Lord (Luke 16:11). Each passing day is a time of grace from which the Lord expects fruit (13:6–9). This teaching is especially illustrated by the parable of the talents (19:13–26 ; Matt. 25:14–30). While waiting for his or her Master, each servant of God is called to bear fruit through the gifts given. Paul understood this well, as shown by his urging the believers to walk faithfully according to the call they had received (1 Cor. 7:17–24). Furthermore, in view of the Second Coming, a believer’s life shows specific ethical characteristics. Among these are hope, love, humility, and holiness.

1. Hope

To serve the God of hope means to enter a way of thought filled with joy, peace, and faith in the future reign (Rom. 15:13). No situation appears desperate, since the presence of the Holy Spirit guarantees the promise of the future. Hope is an anchor of the soul that keeps the ship of faith solidly anchored to the very sanctuary of God (Heb. 6:19 , 20). Hope banishes worry, fear, and anguish, allowing people to lift up their heads (Luke 21:28). All things in the world can be evaluated at their true worth in this light.

2. Love

Jesus has not called His people to love more earnestly because of the nearness of His second coming, but the Second Advent gives love consistency. The apostle Paul placed

love between faith and hope, between the certainty of what Jesus has done for us and what He will still do for us at His second coming (Gal. 5:5 , 6). Christians are called to live in a world that opposes their faith. The victory of the wicked, the outburst of hostile powers, and Christians' own weaknesses could lead to doubt; but faith, carried by the wings of hope, allows the Christian to testify in this world that love will never perish (1 Cor. 13:8).

In person, God will come to put an end to all suffering (Rev. 21:4). For this reason the believer's sufferings become a participation in the suffering of Christ and a pledge of the comfort to come (2Cor. 1:5–7). Whatever the weight of suffering, it cannot compare with the glory to come (Rom. 8:18). Christians may look at their present situation with confidence because the God of love will soon make His victory manifest. Faith, acting through love, testifies to the reality of hope.

3.Humility

To know that the present time will end leads to a proper evaluation of this world's riches. Wealth in itself is not to be condemned, but to think only of earthly matters is enmity to the cross (Phil. 3:18 , 19). The one who awaits the Lord Jesus as Redeemer is a citizen of heaven (verses 18–20 ; John 14:2 , 3). The Christian's manner of dealing with the world is predicated upon the knowledge that it is passing away (1 Cor. 7:30 , 31). Riches are to be measured by the standard of the future (1 Tim. 6:17–19), and the goods of this world by the norm of God's kingdom (Matt. 13:44–46). By seeking first the kingdom and God's righteousness, the believer lays up treasures in heaven (6:19 , 20 , 33).

The Christian is an heir of God and a fellow heir with Christ (Rom. 8:17). Enlightened by the Spirit, the believer discovers the hope that is linked to one's call and the riches of the glory of God's inheritance reserved for the saints (Eph. 1:18). All other matters and objects are transitory and relative. With a renewed mind, one can discern what is good, acceptable, and perfect, bringing eternal dimensions to temporal choices (Rom. 12:2).

4.Holiness

The ethical implications of the Second Coming cannot be overemphasized. To await the last judgment calls for godly living (2 Peter 3:11). To believe in the resurrection brings with it a respect for all mankind and leads to an appreciation of the value of time (1 Cor. 15:32–34). Christians do not live in terror of the judgment, for they know that they are free from condemnation in Jesus Christ (Rom. 8:1). But they must live as redeemed persons, ordering their lives according to faith (Phil. 2:12 , 13). Without sanctification or holiness, no one will see the Lord (Heb. 12:14).

Growth in holiness does not entail a retreat into oneself, a search for one's own salvation apart from others. The hope of the Second Advent mobilizes social values (Heb. 10:25); it develops the sense of justice, goodness, beauty, and truth (Phil. 4:8); it

improves the moral character of believers (AH 16). Christians are particularly capable of fighting injustice, not by anger (James 1:20) but with the spiritual weapons God has given them (Eph. 6:10–18). God’s servants cannot be insensitive to this world’s matters (1 Cor. 6:2 , 3), while being confident that He will soon vindicate those who cry out to Him (Luke 18:7 , 8 ; see Lifestyle II. C. 4).

B. Motivation for Evangelization

Not only does the conviction of a soon-coming return of Jesus affect the quality of the believer’s daily life, but it also provides strong motivation for evangelization. The waiting time provides opportunity for the Holy Spirit to act on believers, imbuing them with a sense of urgency to employ their gifts in sharing the message of grace.

1. The Time of the Holy Spirit

As an answer to the question of the disciples regarding the date of His advent, Jesus promised to send them the Holy Spirit to make them witnesses to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8). The good news must be preached in the whole world before the end comes (Matt. 24:14), but Jesus does not make His return dependent upon the proclamation of the gospel. Still, He does want His followers to take part in His plan for the salvation of the world (Matt. 9:36–38). The same feelings of compassion that motivated Jesus will move all those who live in Christ.

The time of expectation is not, therefore, an intermediate time, an emptiness through which one must try to pass as quickly as possible with eyes fixed on the end. The waiting time belongs to the Holy Spirit, who gathers the believers to establish the eschatological community. He desires them to come into communion with the living Christ and announce to the world that the same grace is offered to all (ST Sept. 15, 1887; RH Aug. 16, 1887).

2. The Time of Grace

“The NT is clear that the present (‘now’) is *the* opportunity which men have to repent and believe (Mark 1:15 ; cf. Acts 3:19 , 20) and that the End delays only for this purpose—and not indefinitely.” “It is man’s final chance,” writes A.L. Moore (209). The apostle Peter calls our time the time of God’s patience (1 Peter 3:9 , 15).

The end of the world is not a question for tomorrow but a call for today (Heb. 4:7). At Jesus’ return “one is taken and one is left” (Matt. 24:40 , 41). Not to warn the world means to be guilty of nonassistance to people in danger. The time of grace will soon be over, and the closer the end comes, the more urgent it is to take a stand for God. As Hebrews 4:1 states: “Therefore, while the promise of entering his rest remains, let us fear lest any of you be judged to have failed to reach it.”

3.The Time of Urgency

Living in the expectation of Jesus' return conveys a sense of urgency (YI Apr. 28, 1908). Jesus Himself traveled the highways and byways of Palestine with the conviction that His time was short (John 9:4). The apostle Paul was inspired by this conviction (1 Cor. 7:29); for this reason he urged believers to make the best possible use of their time (Eph. 5:16 ; Col. 4:5). They were to take every opportunity to testify honestly, because as time went by it would become increasingly difficult to find sympathetic and attentive listeners (2 Tim. 4:2–4).

If the devil is particularly zealous “because he knows that his time is short” (Rev. 12:12), how much more should the believers be awake, especially because “salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed” (Rom. 13:11 ; cf. ST Sept. 15, 1887; RH Aug. 16, 1887).

4.The Time of Spiritual Gifts

The book of Acts shows that the waiting time gives opportunity for the evangelization of the world. The Holy Spirit calls people to this work (Acts 13:1 , 2). He imparts His gifts for the edification and the growth of the church (Eph. 4:11–13). Among the gifts, prophecy was particularly favored as best suited for the building up of the body of Christ and the conversion of unbelievers (1 Cor. 14:1 , 3 , 24 , 25).

Spiritual gifts are bestowed so that the disciples may be the salt and light of the earth, to flavor and illumine the world (Matt. 5:13–16). Christians cannot shirk the duty of testifying, especially as that day approaches. (See Spiritual Gifts II.)

C.Spiritual Preparation for His Return

Faith in the second coming of Jesus affects our value system, creating a motivation for witnessing and evangelization. Of necessity it also presupposes a spiritual preparation. After exhorting His disciples to be ready for the coming of the Son of man (Matt. 24:44), Jesus presented the parable of the 10 virgins (Matt. 25:1–13). Five were depicted as foolish because, even though they were convinced that the bridegroom would arrive in a short time, they did not make any provision for the future. The other five were called wise because they kept on hand a supply of oil, suggesting that they thought the bridegroom might be delayed. Both groups were surprised at the announcement of the bridegroom's arrival, but only the wise ones were able successfully to pass the test of the waiting time between the announcement and the arrival of the bridegroom. Only those who have a personal relationship with Jesus will be able to face every difficulty.

The parable of Matthew 25:1–13 , like the preceding one about the two servants (Matt. 24:45–51), emphasizes the importance of spiritual life and faithful service in relation to Jesus' second coming. Christians should be thankful for the opportunities

given every day to repent and grow in sanctification (Heb. 12:14). They know that they will soon experience glorious renewal as the culmination of a process begun with baptism and the gift of the Holy Spirit (John 3:5).

To live forever under God's authority we must first live now in submission to His laws. For this reason the apostle Paul denounced those sins typical of people who will be lost (1 Cor. 6:9 , 10). John reinforces this point (Rev. 21:8 ; 22:15). As the prophet Amos writes: "Woe to you who desire the day of the Lord!" but do not "let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an everflowing stream" (Amos 5:18 , 24). In contrast, all those who keep the commandments of God and bear the testimony of Jesus are praised (Rev. 12:17 ; 14:12). Holiness of behavior and piety are the natural effects of awaiting the Second Coming (2 Peter 3:11 ; cf. 4T 309; see Great Controversy VI. E).

D. An Apparent Delay

Christ has not yet come. After 2,000 years of expectation, Christians long for the Advent. Could the second coming of Jesus be deferred, delayed, or even worse, cancelled? Many a believer wonders about these possibilities.

In the NT there is a tension between the nearness and the distance of the Second Coming. For Paul, James, and Peter, the day is "at hand" (Rom. 13:12 ; James 5:8 ; 1 Peter 4:7). Jesus Himself assures, "Surely I am coming soon" (Rev. 22:20). But other passages place the Second Coming well into the future. To dispell the notion that the kingdom of God was to appear immediately, Jesus taught the parable about the nobleman who went into a far country (Luke 19:11–27). For Matthew the Master will come back "after a long time" (Matt. 25:19). In other parables Jesus also alludes to an apparent delay (24:48 ; 25:5).

The same tension can be found in the OT . The day of the Lord is both far and near (Hab. 2:3 ; Isa. 2:2 , 20 ; 13:6 ; Zeph. 1:14 ; 3:8).

The tension between "now" and "not yet" excludes any possibility to establish even the year of Jesus' return (10MR 270). The disciples were to be ready at any time (Matt. 24:36–51). The delay, according to Peter, is an expression of the forbearance of the Lord, who is not willing that any should perish (2 Peter 3:9).

God is not slow about His promise. As G. C. Berkouwer rightly states: "Were, now, the return of Christ to be cancelled, the result would not merely be disappointment or disillusionment but a crisis of faith in the veracity and dependability of God" (66, 67). The Bible never suggests any possibility of default on the promise (2 Peter 3:9 ; Heb. 10:39). To the contrary, the surety of the Second Coming is amply confirmed.

God Himself confirms the promise of the Second Coming. His Word is sure. To change what has come out of His mouth would violate His covenant (Ps. 89:35); God does not lie (Num. 23:19 ; 1 Sam. 15:29 ; Heb. 6:13 , 18). In spite of our unfaithfulness,

He remains faithful (2 Tim. 2:13); thus we may hold fast the confession of our hope (Heb. 10:23).

Through His first coming Christ confirmed the surety of the Second Advent. The cross, through which justification was provided, was evidence of His intention to complete the salvation of the believers (Rom. 5:8–10). “He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all, will he not also give us all things with him?” (8:32) echoes this certainty. Christ’s resurrection and ascension clearly point toward His return (John 14:1–3).

The Holy Spirit also confirms the assurance of Jesus’ return. His very presence in the heart of the believer and the gifts He gives certify the promise (2 Cor.– 1:18–22 ; Heb. 2:4).

The preaching of the gospel, commissioned by Christ, finds its meaning and strength in the hope of life to come. God would not raise up preachers of a message and then not be faithful to that message (Titus 1:2 , 3 ; Heb. 2:1–3).

Human reactions to the delay are exemplified in the parable of the faithful and unfaithful servants of Matthew 24 . The unfaithful servant thinks his master delays, for he is not interested in the task he has been given (verse 48). The faithful servant, on the other hand, is totally absorbed by the trust his master has put in him (verses 45 , 46). He looks for the coming of his Lord, but he is thankful for the time of grace he is allowed to live and serve (2 Peter 3:9). He rejoices that the coming of Christ is announced and that the gospel is growing all over the world (Phil. 1:8 ; Col. 1:6). Time seems to be short in view of the magnitude of the task still to be performed, both in the world and in his own heart (2 Cor. 7:1 ; Matt. 9:36 -3p8).

The “delay” of Jesus is not a problem for the believer. It gives meaning to the suffering each believer experiences. Each day brings the joy of seeing more souls added to God’s people (Rev. 6:11).

E. Conclusion

The second coming of Christ gives deep meaning to the history of nations and individuals. A history that consists only of the aimless piling up of facts would lack meaning and order. History without an end or goal becomes senseless.

The Bible invests history with a transcendental character. It has a beginning, and it will have an end, but not just any end. It will not end with a catastrophe produced by human selfishness and pride, nor with that glorious end promised in all humanist utopias. It will be brought to a full stop by God Himself (Ps. 46:9–11).

In a similar manner, life in the Spirit is linked to a destiny. Such a life may be sown in tears, but it will harvest in joy (Ps. 126:4–6). The ethical choices of Christians have meaning. They spread love, trusting in the promise of God. Jesus is coming. The One

who came to Judea to teach mercy and forgiveness is coming to establish His kingdom of love. “For yet a little while, and the coming one shall come and shall not tarry” (Heb. 10:37).

Soon the great controversy between God and Satan will come to an end. God’s justice will be established over the world through Jesus Christ: not only on the earth, but also in heaven, where the battle began. The whole universe will be reconciled with God (Col. 1:20 ; 1 Cor. 15:28).

Jesus is coming back soon. What a comfort, what certainty, what peace! The last book of the Bible closes emphasizing confidence in the second coming of Jesus. “Behold, I am coming soon, bringing my recompense, to repay every one for what he has done” (Rev. 22:12). In response, “the Spirit and the Bride say, ‘Come.’ And let him who hears say, ‘Come’ ” (verse 17). No believer can help but respond to the invitation of the Spirit and the Bride saying, “Amen, Come Lord Jesus!” (verse 20).

III. Historical Overview

A. The Apostolic Period

Historians are unanimous in recognizing that the hope of Jesus’ return remained alive in “the early church. The very terms of one of the earliest NT documents testify to that effect: “ 1 Thessalonians 4:16 , 17 . The thanksgivings that introduce Paul’s Epistles demonstrate that faith in the Parousia constituted a fundamental belief of the early church. Later Epistles still retain a strong eschatological expectation (2 Peter 3:8–13). The Revelation of John, written in a period of crisis at the end of the first century, sustains the believers’ faith through to the glorious visions of the last judgment.

But even in the first century false teachings infiltrated the church, threatening its faith. Some gave up their belief in the resurrection of the dead (1 Cor. 15:12). The certainty of the second advent of Christ was questioned by others (2 Peter 3:4), along with His incarnation (1 John 4:1–3). NT writers wrestled against such tendencies, seeing in them a sign of the approaching end (2:18 , 28 ; 2 Peter 3:3).

B. The Ante-Nicene Period

Some scholars hold that the decline in the church’s fervor toward the Parousia began in the NT period. The evidence cited is the scarcity of eschatological references in several NT Epistles.

Such opinions, however, are disproved by the testimony of second-century writers (Landa 65–95). The expectation of the Parousia remained strong. Thus, Clement of Rome reminded the Corinthians that the Lord must come back soon (*1 Clement* 4 23); the *Didache* is rich with the eschatological vocabulary of Paul’s First Epistle to the Thessalonians (16:3–8); and Ignatius of Antioch wrote that “the last times are come

upon us” (*Ephesians* 11), because of which Christians were to “weigh carefully the times” (*Polycarp* 3). *The Epistle of Barnabas* points out that “the day is at hand on which all things shall perish with the evil [one]. The Lord is near, and His reward” (21. 3). The *Shepherd of Hermas* trusts in the promise of His coming (*Vision* 3. 8, 9). Polycarp of Smyrna (*Philippians* 5) and Papias (as quoted in Eusebius *Ecclesiastical History* 3. 39) wrote of the resurrection of the dead and Christ’s personal return to earth.

The apologists followed the lead of their predecessors. Justin Martyr noted that the prophets proclaimed two advents. In the second, Christ would “come from heaven with glory, accompanied by His angelic host, when also He shall raise the bodies of all men who have lived” (*Apology* 1. 52). In his refutation of Gnosticism, Irenaeus applied the prophecy of Daniel 2 , including the stone signifying the reign of Jesus, to his day (*Against Heresies* 5. 26). At the beginning of the third century Tertullian anticipated the final coming of Christ (*On the Resurrection of the Flesh* 22). In his *Treatise on Christ and Antichrist* , Hippolytus reviewed the prophecies of Daniel and Revelation, concluding with the Second Coming as described in the words of Paul in 1 Thessalonians 4:13–17 .

In a number of writings of that period, however, belief in the immortality of the soul already was relegating eschatology to a secondary role. With their adoption of Greek philosophical thinking, Christian writers no longer felt a great need for Christ’s return in glory because, as noted by Ignatius of Antioch, through death Christians attain to God (*Romans* 1, 2, 6).

Origen spiritualized away the events of the end through the allegorical method of interpretation of Scripture. He affirmed that the Parousia of the Lord on the clouds took place every day in the soul of believers (*Series Commentary on Matthew* 50; cf. PFOF 1:317–320).

At the beginning of the third century the problem of the end of the world was an important question among Christians, particularly at Rome. Political and economic instability, together with persecution, oriented speculation on prophecy toward the coming of the antichrist, believed to be near. Still much influenced by the ordeal of persecution, the Council of Nicea (325) held that “the divine Logos ... will come to judge the living and the dead” and that “the Holy Scriptures teach us to believe also in ... the resurrection of the dead and a judgment of requital” (Kelly 210).

C. The Post-Nicene Period to the Reformation

Soon after Constantine’s death “the idea developed that the earth in its present state” was “the *territory of the prophesied kingdom*; that the present dispensation” was “the *time of its realization*; and that the establishment of the earthly church by human hands” was “the *mode of fulfillment* . Thus it came to be held that the hierarchical rule of the church was actually the predicted kingdom of Christ on earth” (PFOF 1:373).

Several factors contributed to this new trend of thought. Paramount was the church's new legal status and the support brought to the church by the empire. In harmony with this spirit, Eusebius of Caesarea (d. c. 340), having formerly taught that the Second Coming would usher in the divine kingdom (*Proof of the Gospel* 4. 16; 9. 17), now demonstrated the extent to which the Christian empire fulfilled the OT prophecies concerning the covenant (*Commentary on Isaiah* 19. 18). At the same time he showered Constantine with praises, taking him to be the fulfillment of the Christian hope (*Life of Constantine* 2. 28; 3. 1).

No one denied that the ultimate goal of the history of salvation was the advent hope. In fact the Second Coming was mentioned repeatedly in sermons and treatises. Cyril of Jerusalem was even convinced that "the end of the world ... [was] imminent" (*Catechetical Lectures* 15. 12). However, the urgency of the Parousia was no longer as important to Christians as theological disputes on other doctrines.

Influenced by Alexandrian allegorical interpretation of the Bible, Tyconius (fourth century) propounded the idea that the seventh millennium should be counted, not from the Second Coming, but from the Christian Era (Landa 86). Augustine of Hippo (354–430), using Tyconius as his basis, identified the church with the kingdom of God and affirmed that Christ comes to it every day, and the thousand years of the church's reign on earth had begun with Jesus Himself (*City of God* 20. 5–9). At the same time, Augustine could affirm that "the whole church of the true God holds and professes as its creed, that Christ shall come from heaven to judge quick and dead; this is what we call the last day, or last time, of the divine judgment" (*ibid.* 20.1).

Throughout the Middle Ages most Christian theologians followed Augustine's scheme. They believed in an eventual Second Coming while affirming that the church was the kingdom of God. At the same time, many commentators wrote on the book of Revelation. The coming of the antichrist and divine judgment became a prominent yet painful, part of common thought. The flagellants in Italy (thirteenth century) and *The Divine Comedy* of Dante demonstrate to what extent the fear of hell dominated medieval thinking. The belief grew that "the man of sin," or the antichrist, whose coming was an important sign of the end, was not an emperor or a prophet, but rather the visible head of the Christian church. This preoccupation provided leaven for reformation.

D. Reformation

Since Augustine (fifth century), eschatological expectation had been applied to the victory of the church over the world. However, the failure of the church and the Augustinian thesis called for a reformation.

For Luther, the antichrist, whose coming was to precede the end of the world, had already become reality in the Papacy. In view of the "words and signs of Christ," he stated in 1522 that the Second Coming was not far away (*Weimar Ausgabe* 10/1, 2:95);

in a 1532 Table Talk, he affirmed that it was “at the door” (*Tischreden* 1291). This expectation was a deep and abiding part of his faith. Far from seeing the Second Coming as a manifestation of God’s wrath, Luther considered it a happy occasion, one that could be expected with confidence, for the doctrine of justification by faith gave it new meaning. He prayed for that day to come so that Christians might be delivered from suffering and obtain bodies freed from physical distress (WA 41:37). In a 1537 sermon on Matthew 25 Luther gave the following picture: “He will return on the last day with great power, and glorious majesty, and with him the full army of angels.... It will be a glorious judgment and an unspeakable majesty with all the angels present and he in their midst” (*ibid.* 45:325).

Luther’s hope was kept alive in the German reformation. His followers, among them Melancthon and Nikolaus Herman, believed ardently in the Second Coming. His hymns, sung in the congregations, spoke of the glorious expectation.

Similarly, John Calvin admonished his followers to “desire the advent of the Lord” as the “most propitious of all events,” when Christ should come “as a Redeemer to deliver” from “evil and misery, and lead us to the blessed inheritance of his life and glory” (*Institutes* 3. 9. 5). In 1545 Calvin affirmed that the hope of the Second Coming and its accompanying judgment brought happiness to the believer (*Catechism of the Church of Geneva*). In 1560 he dedicated two paragraphs of his *Institutes* to the favorable judgment that Christ would pronounce over His people at His coming (2. 16. 18). Calvin linked the promise of the resurrection to the Second Coming (3. 25. 1–4).

Both Luther and Calvin saw the Protestant Reformation as a fulfillment of Christ’s words in Matthew 24:14. The study of the Bible and the preaching of a gospel purer than that of the times of Augustine and Jerome would make way for the coming of God’s heavenly kingdom. Neither expected the conversion of the whole world, but Luther affirmed, “I believe that the last day is not far off, for the gospel is now making its last effort” (*Tischreden* 5488).

E. From the Reformation to the Nineteenth Century

Following the Reformation, two different eschatological understandings developed on the continent. The radical reformation maintained a live interest in eschatology, sometimes with extreme views regarding an earthly millennium. Menno Simons, as well as later Mennonite confessions, sustained belief in a soon-to-return Saviour. On the other hand, in German Lutheranism, Pietists insisted that for the believer, the greatest challenge was being certain of one’s own salvation. Intense personal religious experience was the hallmark of their experience.

In the British Isles, the hope of Christ’s second coming “appears as one of the most important outcomes of Puritanism’s rediscovery of the essential Biblical message” (Ball, *Advent Hope* 132). Although they held variant interpretations of the millennium, Anglican, Presbyterian, and Congregationalist theologians wrote and preached that the

Second Coming was at hand. The effect of this hope on the believers should be, they proclaimed, to live in readiness for that great day (*ibid.* 146–149).

The French Revolution and the wars that followed it produced social, political, and religious consequences, which, in turn, fostered increased eschatological expectations. A widespread revival of the study of prophecy developed throughout the world. For example, Chilean-born Jesuit Manuel Lacunza published anonymously in 1790 a work entitled *The Coming of the Messiah in Glory and Majesty*, widely translated from its original Spanish. In London, Edward Irving (1792–1834) appended it to the report of the first Albury Prophetic Conference in 1826. To these conferences, held yearly from 1826 to 1830, came clergy from different churches and communions to study the nearness of the Second Advent, the prophecies of Daniel and Revelation, and “the duties of the church arising from these questions” (PFOF 3:276). Joseph Wolff, one of the 20 who attended the 1826 conference, traveled extensively throughout Western and Central Asia, teaching that Christ would come about 1847 to establish a millennial rule in Jerusalem. In Switzerland, François Gaussen presented, beginning in 1837, a series of Sunday school lectures on the prophecies of Daniel. In these he showed that Daniel and Revelation portrayed the history of the world, which would soon come to a close.

Early in the nineteenth century, Christ’s second coming was proclaimed by numerous voices, from scholars in England to young children in Sweden. Many, including Lacunza, showed how the prophecies of Daniel and Revelation clearly pointed to the end of the world by the mid-1900s. In the United States “prophecy was the motivating force in much of the religious thought and activity” of the period (*ibid.* 4:85). Sermons, pamphlets, and books proclaimed that events occurring in the world could only be a prelude to the millennium. Best known of the American preachers was William Miller, who in 1831 began writing and teaching that Jesus would come in 1843. (On William Miller and the Millerite movement, see Adventists I. A-C; Remnant/Three Angels VI. G.)

These movements did not receive a universal welcome from traditional theologians. Catholic theology, born of scholasticism, offered a nontemporal eschatology, mostly interested in death and judgment, heaven and hell (Rast 501–503). Protestant theology was deeply influenced by the development of rationalism and saw the kingdom of God being established on earth by means of the conquest of science and reason. Thus, in the last half of the nineteenth century, the expectation of the nearness of Christ’s coming very nearly disappeared.

F. The Modern Era

After the great disappointment in 1844, believers in the Second Advent had to confront the problem of the delay of the Parousia. This problem has become central to theology today. It has become necessary to explain why the second coming of Christ, so clearly announced in Scripture, has not taken place.

The most prominent scholar to address this question was Albert Schweitzer, who made a distinction between the thinking faith that wonders if one has already entered a

supernatural era and the simple faith that lives in the expectation of the Messianic kingdom (75, 90, 99). For Schweitzer the event of the cross is already an eschatological catastrophe, which puts to an end any apocalyptic expectation.

Karl Barth and Paul Althaus' dialectic theology, recaptured by E. Brunner, ends in transcendental eschatology. These authors had no place for the consummation of concrete history in a universal drama. God transcends time, and His "coming" takes place at all times.

Rudolph Bultmann took yet another step in demythologizing eschatology and history. He elaborated an existential eschatology, according to which the return of Christ takes place in the proclamation of the essence of the gospel, which forces the listener to make a decision of faith.

In the realized eschatology of C. H. Dodd, the final event already has taken place in Jesus' life and preaching. Thus God's eschatological intervention already has been accomplished.

On a differing note, Jürgen Moltmann offers a theology of hope. The future rests upon God's promises, the fulfillment of which we can see in the political, social, and ecological involvement of believers in the world. Thus Moltmann proposes a new humanistic perspective of history. The foremost proponent of the "theology of hope" in the late twentieth century is Wolfhart Pannenberg, whose eschatology is based on the "final future," which determines the ultimate significance of history as a whole and of every individual life. However, the specific content of this "final future" can be referred to only metaphorically and cannot be predicted. The distinction between present and future seems to collapse in the eternal concurrence of all events (Pannenberg 81) and suggests that to some extent Pannenberg shares Moltmann's perspective.

Oscar Cullmann has restored to the history of salvation the central focus of Scripture. History develops objectively in past, present, and future. The church is between the "already" and the "not yet"; this is the time of expectation and proclamation of the gospel. For Cullmann the resurrection of Christ is the foundation of the waiting process. The "believer is to live in the "not yet," expecting something that must come. To reduce eschatology to a personal encounter of faith is an impoverishment of faith. Bible eschatology rests not only upon the resurrection of the body but also on the renewal of all things.

G. Seventh-day Adventists

Shortly after the great disappointment of 1844, believers in the Advent still affirmed the correctness of the date, but recognized their mistaken identification of the event. Christ's coming was still future; they were in the tarrying time and must be found "watching" for that day (see Luke 12:36, 37). Although doctrinal disputes on several issues created factions, there was no serious division on the certainty of a soon-to-return Saviour.

In 1850 James White published four issues of the *Advent Review*. The next year a new journal was begun: *Second Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*. The titles gave evidence of the hope and conviction of the pioneers. In 1851 Ellen White wrote that time could “last but a very little longer” (EW 58).

When the fledgling church adopted a name in 1860, the choice clearly reflected the believers’ confidence. “The name Seventh-day Adventist,” wrote Ellen White, “carries the true features of our faith in front” (1T 224). Early leaders among Seventh-day Adventists were united in the strong conviction that the Second Coming stood near the heart of their message.

The *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* of 1889 stated that “the second coming of Christ is to precede, not follow, the millennium.” Furthermore, the prophetic period of 2300 days of Daniel 8:14 terminated in 1844, and no other “prophetic period is given to reach to the second advent.” In addition, the work of preaching the “approach of the second advent” was symbolized by the three messages of Revelation 14 (148–150).

The basic Adventist understanding of the Second Coming has varied little through the decades. The statement of beliefs that appeared from 1932 onward in the *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* clearly reaffirmed the importance of the Second Coming as “the great hope of the church and the grand climax of the gospel and plan of salvation” (*SDA Yearbook* 1932:382).

On the other hand, discussion has occurred on some issues related to the Advent. For example, among Adventists as late as 1874, the “generation” of Matthew 24:34 was held to be the generation of those who had seen the darkening of the sun and the falling of the stars. Therefore, Jesus’ coming had to occur soon. The importance attached to the signs has also varied. In the late nineteenth century the fate of the Turkish empire was interpreted as a critical sign. Toward the end of the twentieth century, more emphasis has been placed on the earth’s inability to sustain life as an indication of the imminence of Christ’s coming.

Since 1883, when Ellen White’s earlier expressions of belief in a soon-coming Saviour were challenged, Seventh-day Adventists have displayed interest in the question of the delay: Why has Christ not returned? Authors such as L. E. Froom, Herbert Douglass, and Jack Provonsa have attempted to respond. Much has been made of “conditional prophecy” in this respect (Pease 177–182). However, the certainty of the Coming has been repeatedly affirmed, as by Sakae Kubo in 1978: “The cross, the resurrection, and the ascension of Jesus make the coming of Christ an absolute certainty” (99).

In 1987 the Review and Herald Publishing Association published a book written by a group of Seventh-day Adventist scholars: *The Advent Hope in Scripture and History*. In 11 chapters the history and theology of the Second Coming are traced from the OT through the twentieth century, showing the centrality of this teaching for Christians, and especially for Seventh-day Adventists.

The 1980 General Conference session of Seventh-day Adventists adopted 27 “fundamental beliefs.” Number 24 expresses the conviction held by the church and shows continuity with the belief of early Adventists.

“The second coming of Christ is the blessed hope of the church, the grand climax of the gospel. The Saviour’s coming will be literal, personal, visible, and worldwide. When He returns, the righteous dead will be resurrected, and together with the righteous living will be glorified and taken to heaven, but the unrighteous will die. The almost complete fulfillment of most lines of prophecy, together with the present condition of the world, indicates that Christ’s coming is imminent. The time of that event has not been revealed, and we are therefore exhorted to be ready at all times” (*SDA Yearbook* 1981:8).

Such a view is strongly supported by the Scriptures, as the preceding exposition demonstrates.

IV. Ellen G. White Comments

“The doctrine of the second advent is the very keynote of the Sacred Scriptures” (GC 299).

A. The Second Coming in the Scriptures

1. The Center of Hope

“The communion service points to Christ’s second coming. It was designed to keep this hope vivid in the minds of the disciples. Whenever they met together to commemorate His death, they recounted how ‘He took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it; for this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins. But I say unto you, I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father’s kingdom.’ In their tribulation they found comfort in the hope of their Lord’s return. Unspeakably precious to them was the thought, ‘As often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do show the Lord’s death till He come’ (1 Cor. 11:26)” (DA 659).

2. The Kingdom of God

“And the ‘kingdom of God’ which they had declared to be at hand was established by the death of Christ. This kingdom was not, as they had been taught to believe, an earthly empire. Nor was it that future, immortal kingdom which shall be set up when ‘the kingdom and dominion, and the greatness of the kingdom under the whole heaven, shall be given to the people of the saints of the Most High’; that everlasting kingdom, in which ‘all dominions shall serve and obey him’ (Dan. 7:27). As used in the Bible, the expression ‘kingdom of God’ is employed to designate both the kingdom of grace and the kingdom of glory. The kingdom of grace is brought to view by Paul in the Epistle to the Hebrews. After pointing to Christ, the compassionate intercessor who is ‘touched with

the feeling of our infirmities,' the apostle says: 'Let us therefore come boldly unto *the throne of grace*, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace' (Heb. 4:15 , 16). The throne of grace represents the kingdom of grace; for the existence of a throne implies the existence of a kingdom. In many of His parables Christ uses the expression 'the kingdom of heaven' to designate the work of divine grace upon the hearts of men.

“So the throne of glory represents the kingdom of glory; and this kingdom is referred to in the Saviour’s words: ‘When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory: and before Him shall be gathered all nations’ (Matt. 25:31 , 32). This kingdom is yet future. It is not to be set up until the second advent of Christ” (GC 347).

3.Manner of His Coming

“Between the first and the second advent of Christ a wonderful contrast will be seen. No human language can portray the scenes of the second coming of the Son of man in the clouds of heaven. He is to come with His own glory, and with the glory of the Father and of the holy angels. He will come clad in the robe of light, which He has worn from the days of eternity. Angels will accompany Him. Ten thousand times ten thousand will escort Him on His way. The sound of the trumpet will be heard, calling the sleeping dead from the grave” (RH Sept. 5, 1899).

“As the crowning act in the great drama of deception, Satan himself will personate Christ. The church has long professed to look to the Saviour’s advent as the consummation of her hopes. Now the great deceiver will make it appear that Christ has come. In different parts of the earth, Satan will manifest himself among men as a majestic being of dazzling brightness, resembling the description of the Son of God given by John in the Revelation (Rev. 1:13–15). The glory that surrounds him is unsurpassed by anything that mortal eyes have yet beheld. The shout of triumph rings out upon the air: ‘Christ has come! Christ has come!’ The people prostrate themselves in adoration before him, while he lifts up his hands and pronounces a blessing upon them, as Christ blessed His disciples when He was upon the earth. His voice is soft and subdued, yet full of melody. In gentle, compassionate tones he presents some of the same gracious, heavenly truths which the Saviour uttered; he heals the diseases of the people, and then, in his assumed character of Christ, he claims to have changed the Sabbath to Sunday, and commands all to hallow the day which he has blessed. He declares that those who persist in keeping holy the seventh day are blaspheming his name by refusing to listen to his angels sent to them with light and truth. This is the strong, almost overmastering delusion” (GC 624).

“Satan has come down with great power, working with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; but it is not necessary for any to be deceived; and we shall not be if we have fully taken our stand with Christ to follow Him through evil as well as through good report. The serpent’s head will soon be bruised and crushed” (RH Sept. 5, 1899).

4. Signs of the Second Coming

“The revelator thus describes the first of the signs to precede the second advent: ‘There was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became as blood’ (Rev. 6:12).

“These signs were witnessed before the opening of the nineteenth century. In fulfillment of this prophecy there occurred, in the year 1755, the most terrible earthquake that has ever been recorded. Though commonly known as the earthquake of Lisbon, it extended to the greater part of Europe, Africa, and America” (GC 304).

“The marriage relation is holy, but in this degenerate age it covers vileness of every description. It is abused, and has become a crime which now constitutes one of the signs of the last days” (2T 252).

“One of the signs that we are living in the last days is that children are disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy” (FE 101).

“Spiritual darkness has covered the earth and gross darkness the people. There are in many churches skepticism and infidelity in the interpretation of the Scriptures. Many, very many, are questioning the verity and truth of the Scriptures. Human reasoning and the imaginings of the human heart are undermining the inspiration of the Word of God, and that which should be received as granted, is surrounded with a cloud of mysticism. Nothing stands out in clear and distinct lines, upon rock bottom. This is one of the marked signs of the last days” (1SM 15).

“The spirit of intense worldliness that now exists, the disposition to acknowledge no higher claim than that of self-gratification, constitutes one of the signs of the last days” (5T 365).

5. Reasons for Jesus' Second Coming

“Christ has declared that He will come the second time to gather His faithful ones to Himself” (GC 37).

“No literal devil, and probation after the coming of Christ, are fast becoming popular fables. The Scriptures plainly declare that every person's destiny is forever fixed at the coming of the Lord (Rev. 22:11)” (1T 342, 343).

“The work of the investigative judgment and the blotting out of sins is to be accomplished before the second advent of the Lord. Since the dead are to be judged out of the things written in the books, it is impossible that the sins of men should be blotted out until after the judgment at which their cases are to be investigated. But the apostle Peter distinctly states that the sins of believers will be blotted out ‘when the time of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord; and he shall send Jesus Christ’ (

Acts 3:19 , 20). When the investigative judgment closes, Christ will come, and His reward will be with Him to give to every man as his work shall be” (GC 485).

“When the work of the investigative judgment closes, the destiny of all will have been decided for life or death. Probation is ended a short time before the appearing of the Lord in the clouds of heaven” (*ibid.* 490).

“ ‘Even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him,’ Paul wrote. Many interpret this passage to mean that the sleeping ones will be brought with Christ from heaven; but Paul meant that as Christ was raised from the dead, so God will call the sleeping saints from their graves, and take them with Him to heaven” (AA 259).

“So was the faith of this woman rewarded. Christ, the great Life-giver, restored her son to her. In like manner will His faithful ones be rewarded, when, at His coming, death loses its sting and the grave is robbed of the victory it has claimed. Then will He restore to His servants the children that have been taken from them by death” (PK 239).

B. Implications of the Doctrine

1. Effects on the Believer’s Daily Life

“If you have become estranged and have failed to be Bible Christians, be converted; for the character you bear in probationary time will be the character you will have at the coming of Christ. If you would be a saint in heaven, you must first be a saint on earth. The traits of character you cherish in life will not be changed by death or by the resurrection. You will come up from the grave with the same disposition you manifested in your home and in society. Jesus does not change the character at His coming. The work of transformation must be done now. Our daily lives are determining our destiny” (AH 16).

“Belief in the near coming of the Son of man in the clouds of heaven will not cause the true Christian to become neglectful and careless of the ordinary business of life. The waiting ones who look for the soon appearing of Christ will not be idle, but diligent in business. Their work will not be done carelessly and dishonestly, but with fidelity, promptness, and thoroughness. Those who flatter themselves that careless inattention to the things of this life is an evidence of their spirituality and of their separation from the world are under a great deception. Their veracity, faithfulness, and integrity are tested and proved in temporal things. If they are faithful in that which is least they will be faithful in much” (4T 309).

2. Motivation for Evangelization

“Upon those to whom God has given great light, rests the solemn responsibility of calling the attention of others to the significance of the increase of drunkenness and

crime. They should also bring before the minds of others the Scriptures that plainly portray the conditions which will exist just prior to the second coming of Christ” (Te 27).

“There is not one of you that will enter in through the gates into the city alone. If you give back to God in willing service the powers He has given you, not only will you save your own soul, but your influence will be to gather others. Everyone who takes his position steadfastly for the truth is bringing other souls to the same decision and to Heaven” (ST Sept. 15, 1887).

“This is God’s plan: that men and women who are partakers of this great salvation through Jesus Christ should be His missionaries, bodies of light throughout the world, to be as signs to the people—living epistles, known and read of all men; their faith and works testifying to the near approach of the coming Saviour, and that they have not received the grace of God in vain. The people must be warned to prepare for the coming judgment” (RH Aug. 16, 1887).

3.Spiritual Preparation for His Return

“The judgments of God are about to fall upon the world, and we need to be preparing for that great day.

“Our time is precious. We have but few, very few, days of probation in which to make ready for the future, immortal life. We have no time to spend in haphazard movements. We should fear to skim the surface of the word of God” (6T 407).

“They were to pray for its coming as an event yet future. But this petition was also an assurance to them. While they were not to behold the coming of the kingdom in their day, the fact that Jesus bade them pray for it is evidence that in God’s own time it will surely come” (MB 108).

4.Apparent Delay

“Many who have called themselves Adventists have been time-setters. Time after time has been set for Christ to come, but repeated failures have been the result. The definite time of our Lord’s coming is declared to be beyond the ken of mortals” (RH Aug. 16, 1887).

“Different times were set for the Lord to come, and were urged upon the brethren. But the Lord showed me that they would pass by, for the time of trouble must take place before the coming of Christ, and that every time that was set, and passed, would weaken the faith of God’s people” (1T 72).

“Our position has been one of waiting and watching, with no time-proclamation to intervene between the close of the prophetic periods in 1844 and the time of our Lord’s coming. We do not know the day nor the hour, or when the definite time is, and yet the prophetic reckoning shows us that Christ is at the door” (10MR 270).

“Those who think they must preach definite time in order to make an impression upon the people, do not work from the right standpoint. The feelings of the people may be stirred, and their fears aroused; but they do not move from principle. An excitement is created, but when the time passes, as it has done repeatedly, those who moved out upon time fall back into coldness and darkness and sin, and it is almost impossible to arouse their consciences without some great excitement” (RH Aug. 16, 1887).

“In consideration to the shortness of time, we as a people should watch and pray, and in no case allow ourselves to be diverted from the solemn work of preparation for the great event before us. Because the time is apparently extended, many have become careless and indifferent in regard to their words and actions. They do not realize their danger, and do not see and understand the mercy of our God in lengthening their probation, that they may have time to form characters for the future immortal life” (*ibid.*)

C. Historical Overview

1. The Apostolic Period

“The coming of the Lord has been in all ages the hope of His true followers. The Saviour’s parting promise upon Olivet, that He would come again, lighted up the future for His disciples, filling their hearts with joy and hope that sorrow could not quench nor trials dim. Amid suffering and persecution, the ‘appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ’ was the ‘blessed hope’ ” (GC 302).

2. The Post-Nicene Period Until Reformation

“The Waldenses cherished the same faith” (*ibid.* 303).

“Wycliffe looked forward to the Redeemer’s appearing as the hope of the church” (*ibid.*) .

3. The Reformation

“Luther declared: ‘I persuade myself verily, that the day of judgment will not be absent full three hundred years. God will not, cannot, suffer this wicked world much longer’ ” (*ibid.*).

“ ‘This aged world is not far from its end,’ said Melanchthon” (*ibid.*).

“Calvin bids Christians ‘not to hesitate, ardently desiring the day of Christ’s coming as of all events most auspicious’; and declares that ‘the whole family of the faithful will keep in view that day’ ” (*ibid.*).

“ ‘Has not the Lord Jesus carried up our flesh into heaven?’ said Knox, the Scotch Reformer, ‘and shall He not return? We know that He shall return, and that with expedition’ ” (*ibid.*).

“Ridley and Latimer, who laid down their lives for the truth, looked in faith for the Lord’s coming” (*ibid.*).

“ ‘The thoughts of the coming of the Lord,’ said Baxter, ‘are most sweet and joyful to me’ ” (*ibid.*).

“Such was the hope of the apostolic church, of the ‘church in the wilderness,’ and of the Reformers” (*ibid.* 304).

4.From the Reformation to the Nineteenth Century

“But as the spirit of humility and devotion in the church had given place to pride and formalism, love for Christ and faith in His coming had grown cold.... The doctrine of the second advent had been neglected; the scriptures relating to it were obscured by misinterpretation, until it was, to a great extent, ignored and forgotten. Especially was this the case in the churches of America” (*ibid.* 309).

“It was not the scholarly theologians who had an understanding of this truth, and engaged in its proclamation. Had these been faithful watchmen, diligently and prayerfully searching the Scriptures, they would have known the time of night; the prophecies would have opened to them the events about to take place. But they did not occupy this position, and the message was given by humbler men” (*ibid.* 312).

“Like the great Reformation of the sixteenth century, the advent movement appeared in different countries of Christendom at the same time. In both Europe and America men of faith and prayer were led to the study of the prophecies, and, tracing down the inspired record, they saw convincing evidence that the end of all things was at hand” (*ibid.* 357).

“In South America,... Lacunza, a Spaniard and a Jesuit, found his way to the Scriptures and thus received the truth of Christ’s speedy return.... Lacunza lived in the eighteenth century, but it was about 1825 that his book, having found its way to London, was translated into the English language. Its publication served to deepen the interest already awakening in England in the subject of the second advent” (*ibid.* 363).

“In Germany the doctrine had been taught in the eighteenth century by Bengel, a minister in the Lutheran Church and a celebrated Biblical scholar and critic” (*ibid.* 363).

“Bengel’s writings have been spread throughout Christendom. His views of prophecy were quite generally received in his own state of Württemberg, and to some extent in other parts of Germany” (*ibid.* 364).

“The light shone also in France and Switzerland. At Geneva where Farel and Calvin had spread the truth of the Reformation, Gausson preached the message of the second advent” (*ibid.* 364).

“In Scandinavia also the advent message was proclaimed, and a widespread interest was kindled.... But the clergy of the state church opposed the movement.... In many places where the preachers of the Lord’s soon coming were thus silenced, God was pleased to send the message, in a miraculous manner, through little children” (*ibid.* 366).

“In 1821, three years after Miller had arrived at his exposition of the prophecies pointing to the time of the judgment, Dr. Joseph Wolff, ‘the missionary to the world,’ began to proclaim the Lord’s soon coming” (*ibid.* 357).

“As early as 1826 the advent message began to be preached in England” (*ibid.* 362).

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The Millennium

Eric Claude Webster

Introduction

Only in Revelation 20 is there biblical reference to the period known as the 1,000 years, commonly called the millennium. Accepting the Apocalypse as an inspired biblical book, we must integrate the concept of the millennium into its general scheme of eschatology. Because some early Church Fathers developed a picture of the millennium that resulted in extreme views of earthliness, many have neglected this issue. In fact, the millennium has been rejected by many.

As described in Revelation 20:1–14, the millennium is a period of 1,000 years bounded by two resurrections; the first is that of the righteous at the second advent of Christ and the second is that of the wicked at the conclusion of the period. Satan is bound at the beginning of the millennium—his opportunity for deception comes to an end. All the righteous, living and resurrected, are given immortality and taken to heaven to live and reign with Christ for the duration of the millennium. The wicked are destroyed by the brightness of Christ’s coming, leading to the depopulation of the earth. In this condition the earth becomes a “bottomless pit,” to which Satan and his angels are confined for the 1,000 years.

In heaven the righteous reign with Christ and take part in the deliberative phase of the judgment upon the wicked. Upon the completion of this work Christ and the saints return to this earth accompanied by the New Jerusalem. With the descent of Christ and the city the wicked are raised, resulting in another opportunity for Satan to become active. He performs his last act of deception in persuading the wicked to attack the New Jerusalem.

At this time the final judgment of the wicked takes place, and all who have rejected God’s mercy and grace face the tribunal. There is no advocate to plead mercy, and final retribution falls upon them. The fires that destroy Satan and his followers also destroy all vestiges of sin. Out of the dust and ashes of this judgment will emerge God’s re-created world, the eternal home for the people of God.

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