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The Certainty of the Advent Hope

Adapted from Chapter 4 of **THE ADVENT HOPE FOR HUMAN HOPELESSNESS**

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Christ's promise to come again stands out, among all that is difficult to comprehend in Biblical prophecies, for its clarity, centrality, and certainty. This promise constitutes the assurance and goal of the Christian hope for a better future. For almost two millennia Christians have confessed in their credal statements belief in the Lord Jesus Christ who "for our salvation came down from heaven, and was made flesh. . . and comes again with glory to judge living and dead, of whose kingdom there shall be no end" (Nicene Creed).

Objective of Study. This study examines the Biblical basis of the historical belief in Christ's Return by surveying what the New Testament has to say about it.

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Longing for the Second Advent

Gianluca Bacchiocchi

When we are young, full of hope and excitement for our future on Earth, we seldom contemplate the depth and richness of Christ's promise to return and take us to our heavenly home. We are so focused on the here and now that, somewhat irrationally, we place Christ's return in the distant future. This myopic view deadens the ability of our senses to pick up the many signs and fulfillments of prophecy that point to Christ's imminent return. Worse still, it may cause us to place our desire for Christ's certain and imminent return on the back-burner, rather than fan its flame.

As we age and encounter financial or relational hardships, crises, illnesses or even the death of a loved one, our senses are awoken and we finally embrace what had been latent all along – the earnest desire for Christ to return, and quickly. In my case, it wasn't until my father, who was a fountain of strength and the epitome of vitality, was diagnosed with cancer that I understood the true nature of human frailty – no one can escape the consequences of sin on this Earth. And then, with my father's passing, the deeper significance of Christ's return became clearer. We are not meant to suffer the consequences of sin forever. We have the hope for a life that is far better than anything we have experienced on Earth. We will be made whole and reunited with our loved ones that have died in Christ. Our Savior's return will make this all a reality!

My father, in his Advent Seminars, loved to preach about the hope that Christians should have in Christ's certain return. This study, which is adapted from chapter 4 of my father's book, **THE ADVENT HOPE FOR HUMAN HOPELESSNESS**, helps us to better appreciate the certainty and significance of Christ's return and what we, as Christians, can do to prepare for that magnificent day. May God richly bless you as you read this study that will be sure to strengthen your hope in the certainty of Christ's glorious return to take us home.

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New Pricing of Books, DVDs and CDs from Biblical Perspectives

Biblical Perspectives began offering in May a new pricing scheme for all of the books, DVDs and CDs that it carries. All of the books, CDs and DVDs are now 20% off of the retail price (the retail prices for most CDs and DVDs have also been reduced). If you would like to order 2 copies of the same book, CD or DVD, you will receive 40% off of the retail price. Beginning with 3 or more items, you can mix and match any book, CD and DVD and receive bulk pricing. For example, if you were to order 3 to 9 items comprising of a combination of the same or different books, CDs or DVDs, you would receive 40% off of the retail price for each item. If you were to order 10-29 items, you would receive 60% off of the retail price, 30-99 items, you would receive 72% off of the retail price, and 100 or more items, you would receive 80% off of the retail price. In order to obtain this new pricing, please call us at (269) 471-2915 or write to Biblical Perspectives, 4975 Appian Way, Berrien Springs, MI 49103. Our website, www.biblicalpherspectives.com, does reflect the new single book pricing, but not the new mix and match pricing. We hope to have our updated website up and running soon and plan to include the new pricing scheme on our updated website. If you have any questions regarding the ordering of materials, you can also email Daniel Bacchiocchi at dan@biblicalpherspectives.com.

Update on Endtime Issues Newsletter Advisory Committee

As previously mentioned, we plan to expand the Endtime Issues Newsletter by including more articles from various scholars and thinkers that examine significant current issues from a biblical perspective. To further this objective, we are excited to announce that we have formed an advisory committee of respected scholars in diverse areas that will help provide, solicit and review materials that will be published in the Endtime Issues Newsletter. We will be providing more information on the members of the advisory committee in the next Endtime Issues Newsletter. Thank you for your prayers and please continue to pray for this ministry. Our goal is that the Endtime Issues Newsletter will provide you with information that will not only enhance your personal walk with Christ, but also increase your desire to serve Him here on Earth.

Projectors

If you or your organization is interested in purchasing a Hitachi projector with a 3 year manufacturer warranty, please call Biblical Perspectives at (269) 471-2915 and ask for Daniel or email Daniel directly at dan@biblicalpherspectives.com. He will be more than happy to help you purchase the right projector for your purpose as well as any peripherals that you many need.

At the moment, we have a special on the Hitachi CP-X401 projector. It is a 3000 lumens projector that works well in classroom and meeting hall applications. It retails for \$2795.00, and we normally sell it for \$887. While supplies last, we are offering it for \$780. This includes shipping (48 states) and Hitachi's 3 year warranty.

*The Certainty of the Advent Hope
continued from page 1*

For the sake of clarity, this study is divided into the following five sections:

1. The Teachings of Jesus
2. The Testimony of Peter
3. The Testimony of Paul
4. The Testimony of Hebrews and James
5. The Testimony of John

PART ONE

THE TEACHINGS OF JESUS

The Gospels. The teachings of Jesus are the logical starting place of an inquiry into what the New Testament teaches about the Second Advent. Our source of Jesus' teachings is obviously the Gospels, which report extensively on Christ's sayings, discourses, and parables dealing with His future glorious Coming.

Admittedly, what the Evangelists report are not the exact words (*ipsissima verba*) of Christ. If that were the case, there would be no differences in the form and content of those sayings reported in the synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke).

The existence of these apparent discrepancies (known as the synoptic problem) has led numerous scholars to

conclude that the Gospels' portrait of Jesus' person and teaching is distorted. Lately, however, Biblical scholarship has been inclined to acknowledge the evangelists' intention not to distort facts, but to represent Christ accurately.¹ Variations which disturb our modern concern for accuracy of details did not worry New Testament writers or believers, for whom the basic story of Christ's life and teachings was more important than its details.

Our approach, therefore, will be to interpret Jesus' sayings about His Return as they stand in the Gospels, endeavoring to understand their basic teaching in the light of its historical, cultural, and contextual settings.

Extensive Coverage. Jesus' teachings on His Second Advent are reported extensively in the Gospels. For example, the only long speech of Christ which is found in all three synoptic Gospels (Matt 24; Mark 13; Luke 21), is the Olivet Discourse whose main subject is the Second Advent. In addition, we have numerous explicit sayings and parables as well as implicit symbols and allusions referring to Christ's Coming.

In His humiliation before unbelieving judges, Christ professed to be the Messiah and gave as a proof-sign His future "coming with the clouds."

The significance of this extensive coverage should not be ignored. It obviously reflects the importance attributed to the Parousia (*i.e.*, Christ's second coming). For the sake of brevity and clarity, we shall briefly consider only those texts which explicitly refer to the Second Coming, subdividing them into (1) The Sayings of Christ, (2) The Olivet Discourse, (3) The Last Discourse, and (4) The Parables.

1. The Sayings of Christ

Mark 8:38 and parallels. A first significant Advent saying reported with slight variation in all the three synoptic Gospels reads: "For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of man also be ashamed, when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels" (Mark 8:38; cf. Matt 16:27; Luke 9:26).

The setting of this pronouncement is noteworthy. In all the synoptic Gospels, Jesus' words follow Peter's confession, Christ's announcement of His death and resurrection, and His summons to follow Him by taking up His cross. The promise of recognition and reward (cf. Matt 16:27) at the future glorious Coming of the Son of

Man follows, then, the challenge to confess Christ and be loyal to Him in this world.

No person who has been ashamed to show his allegiance to Christ in this world can expect to share in His glory at His Return. Another striking feature of this saying is Jesus' confidence in the ultimate triumph of His redemptive mission—a triumph that will be celebrated at His Second Coming.

Mark 14:61-62 and parallels. The same note of confidence is sounded in another Advent saying reported also by all the synoptics, where Christ professes His Messiahship before the Sanhedrin: "The high priest asked him 'Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?' And Jesus said, 'I am; and you will see the Son of man seated at the right hand of Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven' (Mark 14:61-62; cf. Matt 26:63-64; Luke 22:67-69). In His humiliation before unbelieving judges, Christ professed to be the Messiah and gave as a proof-sign His future "coming with the clouds."

This sign could readily be understood by the council members familiar with Daniel's prophecy: "Behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, . . . And to him was given dominion and glory and kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed" (Dan 7:13-14).

Christ will be vindicated when His opponents "will see" the fulfillment of this prophecy. This means that Jesus' visible Return in glory, to be witnessed by every creature, is the unmistakable proof of the validity of His messianic redemptive mission. Thus, if there were no Second Coming, there would never be a universal vindication of Christ's work.²

The Coming of the Son of man serves to reveal on the one hand God's vindication of His people and on the other hand the lack of faith on the part of those who failed to wait for Him.

Luke 18:8. Luke reports an allusion Christ made to His Return in an unusual context, namely, at the conclusion of the parable of the widow and the judge. The teaching of the parable is that God will vindicate those who do not become discouraged in prayer (Luke 18:7-8). This assurance is followed by Christ's saying: "Nevertheless, when the Son of man comes, will he find faith on earth?" (Luke 18:8).

The connection between this saying and what precedes is presumably twofold. The Coming of the Son of man serves to reveal on the one hand God's vindication of His people and on the other hand the lack of faith on the part of those who failed to wait for Him.

2. The Olivet Discourse

It was perhaps Tuesday afternoon of Passion Week. As Jesus left the Temple, His disciples remarked on the magnificence of its structures. To their surprise, Jesus predicted their total destruction. They were on the way to Bethany and as they ascended the slope of the Mount of Olives, they rested at a spot overlooking the Temple area. At this juncture the disciples approached Christ privately and asked: "Tell us, when will this be, and what will be the sign when these things are all to be accomplished?" (Mark 13:4).

The Problem. The disciples' question was obviously about the historical destruction of the Temple. In Matthew, however, the disciples' question involves two distinct events: "Tell us when will this be [i.e. the destruction of the Temple], and what will be the sign of your coming and of the close of the age?" (Matt 24:3). We can assume that the form of the question in Matthew interprets correctly the sense of Mark. In other words, the reference to Christ's Coming and to the close of the age which is explicit in Matthew is implicit in Mark's reference to the destruction of the Temple which apparently was seen as one of the signs preceding the end of the age.

The linking of the future to the present serves to give added realism to what is to come.

In answer to the disciples' double question, Christ forewarned them about the occurrence of various signs or conditions. The difficulty is that in Mark and Matthew, Jesus makes no attempt to differentiate between those signs which refer to the historical destruction of the Temple and those which related to His Coming. For example, in Mark and Matthew, Jesus speaks of the "desolating sacrilege" and of the "great tribulation" in the eschatological context of His Coming (Mark 13:14-21; Matt 24:15-28). In Luke, however, these events are explicitly connected with "Jerusalem surrounded by armies" (Luke 21:20).

Solutions. Many conservative interpreters reconcile this difference by interpreting Mark and Matthew in the light of Luke. Thus, the tribulation and the desolating sacrilege

are understood as referring to the historical events of A. D. 66-70 which resulted in the destruction of the Temple.

This interpretation has some merits since some of the warning, such as the need to flee from Judea to the mountains, can hardly be related to a universal tribulation caused by an eschatological antichrist. The problem with this view, however, is that the Parousia is placed "*immediately* after the tribulation of those days" (Matt 24:29; cf. Mark 13:24), which would mean that the last-day events are viewed as contemporaneous to the historic tribulation and desolating sacrilege of A.D. 70.

Prophetic Perspective. Several other solutions have been proposed to reconcile the apparent tension between historical and eschatological references which overlap in the Olivet Discourse.³ In our view, the most satisfactory explanation is to be found in the so-called *prophetic perspective*, which we discussed in chapter of **THE ADVENT HOPE FOR HUMAN HOPELESSNESS**. Like the Old Testament prophets, Jesus intermingles historical with eschatological events; that is to say, He sees, through the transparency of those events associated with the imminent fall of Jerusalem, the fulfillment of those events leading to His Parousia. The linking of the future to the present serves to give added realism to what is to come.⁴

Teaching. The specific signs of the end given in the Olivet Discourse are considered in chapters 8, 9, and 10 of **THE ADVENT HOPE FOR HUMAN HOPELESSNESS**. At this point, we simply note what Jesus said directly about His Parousia. First of all, He describes His Coming as a spectacular event bringing about the universal gathering of believers: "And then they will see the Son of man coming in clouds with great power and glory. And then he will send out the angels, and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven" (Mark 13:26-27). This description allows for no secret rapture. In Matthew, the visibility of Christ's Coming is emphasized through its comparison to a flashing lightning (Matt 24:27).

Second, Jesus teaches that His Coming "is near, at the very gates" (Mark 13:29; cf. Matt 24:33). He emphasizes this truth by pointing to the signs of the approaching summer that can be seen in the budding of the fig tree. The meaning of the imminence of Christ's Coming are considered in chapters 5 and 6 of **THE ADVENT HOPE FOR HUMAN HOPELESSNESS**.

Third, Jesus teaches that “the coming of the Son of man” will be as sudden and unexpected as the flood was for the people living in the days of Noah (Matt 24:36-39).

Fourth, Jesus teaches that at His Return there will be only two classes of people: those who are waiting for Him and those who are not. The drastic separation that will occur between believers and unbelievers is spelled out dramatically: “Then two men will be in the field; one is taken and one is left. Two women will be grinding at the mill; one is taken and one is left” (Matt 24:40-41).

In the Olivet Discourse, then, Jesus teaches that His Coming is glorious, visible, imminent, sudden, discriminating, and, above all, it is to be constantly watched for.

Finally, Jesus warns emphatically to watch for His Return: “Watch therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming: (Matt 24:42; cf. Mark 13:35-37). This is the keynote that Christ sounds repeatedly in His Olivet Discourse: Watch! Literally, “Stay wide awake!” and be ready for my Coming!

This is the closing note of the Discourse itself sounded in all three Gospels: “And what I say to you I say to all: Watch” (Mark 13:37; cf. Matt 24:42-44; Luke 21:34). In the Olivet Discourse, then, Jesus teaches that His Coming is glorious, visible, imminent, sudden, discriminating, and, above all, it is to be constantly watched for.

3. The Last Discourse of Jesus

The Setting. John reports the Last Discourse of Jesus (John 14-16) instead of the Olivet Discourse. The setting is an upper room in Jerusalem where Jesus has partaken of the Last Supper with His disciples on the eve of His death. Judas Iscariot had left the room (John 13:30) when Jesus announced to His eleven disciples: “Little children, yet a little while I am with you. You will seek me; and as I said to the Jews so now I say to you, ‘Where I am going you cannot come’” (John 13:33).

Noting their troubled faces, Jesus responded by pronouncing the famous discourse which begins with the reassuring words: “Let not your hearts be troubled; believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father’s house are many rooms; if it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? 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).

Christ’s Central Promise. “I will come again” was Christ’s central promise to His troubled disciples and it is still His central promise to us today, often troubled by doubts and uncertainties about our future. Some interpret the words “I will come again” as referring to the coming of the Holy Spirit, called the Paraclete (John 14:18, 28), since the latter is the main theme of the discourse (John 14:15-24; 15:26; 16:4-15).

There is a sense in which Jesus came into the lives of His disciples on the day of Pentecost through the sending of the Holy Spirit (a coming known as “realized eschatology”). Indeed, Christ makes His presence real in our lives through the Holy Spirit who dwells in us (John 14:16). But in the Gospel of John Jesus teaches not only His immediate presence in the believers through the Holy Spirit, but also His future presence through His personal Coming to take His followers to Himself.

Christ comes *to* His followers through the Holy Spirit in the present and comes *for* His followers personally in the future (“I will come again and will take you to myself” [John 14:3]). In John, the future Coming of Christ is not eliminated but rather is actualized through the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

“I will come again” was Christ’s central promise to His troubled disciples and it is still His central promise to us today, often troubled by doubts and uncertainties about our future.

John offers another clear indication of Christ’s personal Return in reporting Christ’s answer to Peter’s question regarding the beloved disciple: “If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you?” (John 21:22). The phrase “until I come” can hardly refer to Pentecost, for John wrote these words many years after that event when the rumor was circulating that John would not die (John 21:23). Its only logical reference is to the Second Coming. It is significant that John closes his Gospel alluding to the prevailing expectancy of the Lord’s Return.

4. The Parables

Wheat and Tares. To illustrate the purpose of and the preparation for His Coming, Christ used several parables. In the parables of the wheat and tares and of the dragnet (Matt 13:24-30, 36-43, 47-50), Christ illustrates the nature of the Gospel age which culminates with His Second Coming.

Both parables teach the principle of religious liberty. During this age no person has the right to separate the wheat from the tares, the good from the bad fish, that is, those who are in the Kingdom from those who are not. The separation is to take place at the End: "The harvest is the close of the age, and the reapers are angels. Just as the weeds are gathered and burned with fire, so will it be at the close of the age. The Son of man will send his angels, and they will gather out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all evildoers, and throw them into the furnace of fire; . . . Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father" (Matt 13:39-43; cf. 13:49-50).

In both parables the purpose of Christ's Coming is to accomplish a complete and final separation between the righteous and the wicked. The latter, as taught also in the parable of the net, are destroyed in the "furnace of fire" (Matt 13:50). This teaching hardly allows for the view that Christ's Return will be followed by a millennial age in which Jesus and the redeemed will rule over the wicked.

There are certain things which cannot be obtained or borrowed at the last minute. We cannot develop a character or borrow a relationship with God when it is too late.

Ten Virgins. In Matthew the Olivet Discourse is followed by a chapter containing three parables, each using a different imagery to represent Christ's Coming and to emphasize areas of preparation for this event. In the parable of the Ten Virgins, Christ's Return is compared to the unexpected arrival of a bridegroom (Matt 25:1-13; cf. Luke 2:12; 35-40). Here the area of preparation underscored is the *spiritual*.

There are certain things which cannot be obtained or borrowed at the last minute. We cannot develop a character or borrow a relationship with God when it is too late. Our lives need to be constantly filled with the oil of the Holy Spirit (1 Sam 10:1, 6; 16:13) if we are to be ready to meet the Lord at His Coming. When the bridegroom comes, the door is shut (Matt 25:10). There is no room for a second chance, as some pre-millennialists advocate. The Advent seals the irreversible decision and destiny of every individual.

The Talents. In the parable of the talents, Christ's Coming is compared to a Master returning from a long journey to settle accounts with his servants (Matt 25:14-30; cf. Luke 19:11-27). The area of preparation stressed

by this parable is the *stewardship* of our resources such as time, money, and skills.

"There are some people," write Ralph Earle, "who are strong on worship but weak on service. These need to heed the warning of the parable of the talents (vv. 14-30). It is not enough to take care of our spiritual devotion. We must be busy about our Master's business. We must use the talents He has given us in furthering the work of His kingdom."⁵

The criteria by which Christ will separate the sheep from the goats, the believers from the unbelievers, are not the knowledge, the fame, or the fortune acquired, but rather the attention given to those in need.

Sheep and Goats. The Coming of "the Son of man . . . in his glory" to judge "all the nations" is also compared to "a shepherd [who] separates the sheep from the goats" (Matt 25:31-32). The area of preparation emphasized by this parable is the *social responsibility* of the Christian who waits for the Coming of the Lord.

The criteria by which Christ will separate the sheep from the goats, the believers from the unbelievers, are not the knowledge, the fame, or the fortune acquired, but rather the attention given to those in need. The specific acts which Christ picks out are: giving food to the hungry, water to the thirsty, welcoming strangers, comforting the sick, and visiting the prisoners.

None of these acts necessarily involved large financial expenditures. They are simple acts anyone can do as he sees human need every day. Such acts are to be done spontaneously, instinctively, not to receive recognition but just for the sake of helping anyone in need, including "the least of these my brethren" (Matt 25:39). The wonderful truth that Jesus presents is that at His Coming He will acknowledge all such acts as if given directly to Himself (Matt 25:40).

Conclusion. These parables, spoken by Jesus toward the close of His ministry, reveal His concern both to assure His followers about the certainty of His Return, and to encourage and admonish them to be ready for His Parousia. This preparation involves spiritual, moral growth exemplified by the wise virgins, good stewardship represented by the good and faithful servant, and social concern for human need manifested by sheep that Christ places at His right hand at His Coming.

All these parables underscore that the final reward that Christ will give at His return cannot be taken for granted. To profess to be a disciple of Christ is no guarantee of salvation. The foolish virgins were invited to the wedding, the idle servant had a share of his Master's property, the goats belonged to the same Shepherd. Yet they all received retribution instead of reward because their profession was not authenticated by practice.

PART TWO

THE TESTIMONY OF PETER

Peter's witness about the Second Coming of Christ is first found in the Acts of the Apostles. On the day of Pentecost after calling upon his hearers to repent, Peter spoke of God's promise to "send the Christ appointed for you, Jesus, whom heaven must receive until the time for establishing all that God spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from of old" (Acts 3:21-22).

In this proclamation Peter implies that Christ will remain in heaven "until the time" when He will return to bring about the final restoration predicted by the prophets. What Peter here implies, he clearly teaches in his two Epistles. In both of them, the day of Christ's Coming plays a large role, being presented both as a day of salvation and as a day of judgment.

1. Day of Salvation

Peter views the Second Advent as a time of "salvation ready to be revealed in the last time" (1 Pet 1:5; cf. 1:9). The believer already possesses "an inheritance which is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven" (1 Pet 1:4). These blessings kept in heaven are to be enjoyed not at death but at the Return of Christ. It is at that time that "the chief Shepherd" will be manifested and believers "will obtain the unfading crown of glory" (1 Pet 5:4).

In short, for Peter, the day of Christ's Coming will be a day of salvation in which the blessings presently stored in heaven will descent to believers on earth.

Peter emphasizes how this Advent Hope can sustain believers in meeting the present suffering. Before the end, which Peter views as near (1 Pet 4:7), believers "may have to suffer various trials" (1 Pet 1:6). These sufferings, however, are to last only "a little while" because Christ will soon "restore, establish, and strengthen" His people (1 Pet 5:10; cf. 1:6). In short, for Peter, the day of Christ's Coming will be a day of

salvation in which the blessings presently stored in heaven will descent to believers on earth.

2. Day of Judgment

Scoffers. The second Advent is for Peter also "a day of visitation" (1 Pet 2:12) and a "day of judgment" (2 Pet 2:9) for the unrighteous. Among these are some who scoff and ridicule the idea of the Parousia, saying: "Where is the promise of his coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things have continued as they were from the beginning of creation" (2 Pet 3:4). This question indicates that the expectation of Christ's Coming was not only widespread among Christians but also ridiculed by scoffers. Today, as a result of the evolutionary theory which is based on the assumption that "all things have continued as they were from the beginning," scoffers have increased in number and vigor.

What to some appears as a delay of the Parousia in reality is a revelation of God's merciful saving purpose: it gives to more people more time and opportunities to repent and be saved.

Peter responds to the scoffers first by reminding them that as this earth was once destroyed by the Flood, so it will be destroyed finally and more radically by fire on "the day of judgment" (2 Pet 3:7). Second, Peter points out that God counts time differently from human beings. For Him one day is as a thousand years and a thousand years as one day (v. 8).

What to some appears as a delay of the Parousia in reality is a revelation of God's merciful saving purpose: it gives to more people more time and opportunities to repent and be saved (2 Pet 3:9). However, when the appointed time arrives, Christ *will* come unexpectedly as a thief at night (2 Pet 3:10).

Functions of the Day of Judgment. Peter emphasizes two functions of the day of Judgment: "destruction of ungodly men" (2 Pet 3:7) and restoration of this present fallen order (2 Pet 3:10). The central theme of the second chapter of 2 Peter is divine judgment. If God did not spare the angels that sinned, if He did not spare the ancient world when it became depraved in the days of Noah, if he reduced to ashes the wicked cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, He will certainly destroy the unrighteous on the day of judgment (2 Pet 2:4-10; cf. 3:7, 10).

But the ultimate purpose of divine judgment is not destruction, but the complete transformation will purge

this earth of all corruption and will result in a new heaven and a new earth (2 Pet 3:10, 12, 13). The description of how this will happen is very dramatic: “the heavens will pass away with a loud noise, and the elements will be dissolved with fire, and the earth and the works that are upon it will be burned up” (2 Pet 3:10).

Some dismiss this cataclysmic description as fruit of poetic fantasy or apocalyptic imagery. But in our nuclear age it is not difficult to visualize how this description could be fulfilled to the very letter. The total destruction of this present order by fire is, however, not the end, but the beginning of a “new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells” (2 Pet 3:13).

But the ultimate purpose of divine judgment is not destruction, but the complete transformation will purge this earth of all corruption and will result in a new heaven and a new earth.

The hope of this new world-order provides the incentive for godly Christian living: “Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of persons ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, . . . Therefore, beloved, since you wait for these, be zealous to be found by him without spot or blemish, and at peace” (2 Pet 3:11, 12, 14).

The Advent Hope, then, with its promise of salvation, destruction, and restoration, is for Peter not only a future expectation but also a present motivating force to holy living. Its implications for determining our values, decisions, aspirations, and priorities are considered in chapter 16 of **THE ADVENT HOPE FOR HUMAN HOPELESSNESS**.

PART THREE

THE TESTIMONY OF PAUL

The hope of the soon-Coming Savior was central to Paul’s thinking and living. This is indicated by his frequent and vivid descriptions of the Second Advent. His teaching on this doctrine is unquestionably the most informative and influential of the New Testament. His major contribution was to save the Advent Hope from two blind alleys: *unhistorical spiritualism* and *date-setting sensationalism*.

Paul believed in the imminent Return of Christ, possibly within his own lifetime (Rom 13:11; 1 Thess 4:15; 1 Cor 7:26,31), but he never fell into the trap of date-setting.

For him the certainty of Christ’s Return overshadowed any consideration of the time factor.

No Spiritualization. Moreover, though Paul actualized the Advent Hope by saying, for example, that we already enjoy “the first fruits” of the Advent harvest (Rom 8:23) and that we already live in Christ (Phil 1:21), he strongly rejected any attempt to spiritualize away the reality of Christ’s visible Return. He marveled that the Thessalonians should become so “quickly shaken in mind or excited” by the deceptive teaching that “the day of the Lord has come” (2 Thess 2:2). To counteract this deceptive and disruptive spiritualization of the Advent, Paul explains what development must occur before the Lord’s Return (2 Thess 2:3-12).

A convenient way to summarize Paul’s teachings regarding the Second Coming is to study the four main designations he uses to describe significant aspects of this event.

1. The Day of the Lord

Decisive Judgment. One expression used by Paul is “the Day of the Lord.” This phrase, as noted earlier, is used frequently in the Old Testament to describe both imminent historical divine judgments and God’s final visitation to bring salvation to the faithful and punishment to the wicked.

In Paul’s letters “the Day of the Lord” denotes the decisive judgment that God will execute through Christ at the End. Such a day is referred to in a variety of ways: the Day of the Lord (2 Thess 2:2; 5:2), the Day of our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Cor 1:8), the Day of the Lord Jesus (1 Cor 5:5; 2 Cor 1:14), the day of Christ or of Jesus Christ (Phil 1:6, 10; 2:16), and that Day (2 Thess 1:10; 2 Tim 1:18). Such a variety of designations is indicative of the tremendous importance attached to the judgment executed by Christ at His Coming.

Retribution and Reward. The Day of the Lord will be a time when “each man’s work will become manifest; for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one had done” (1 Cor 3:13). For the rebellious it will be a time of dreadful punishment (2 Thess 1:8-10), while for the believers it will be a time of “rest” and glorification (2 Thess 1:7, 10).

Paul is certain that “on that Day” the Lord “the righteous Judge,” will award a “crown of righteousness” not only to him “but also to all who have loved his appearing” (2 Tim

4:8). Christians who look forward to the Day of the Lord, which “will come like a thief in the night” (1 Thess 5:2), are therefore urged not to sleep but to “keep awake and be sober” (1 Thess 5:6), so that they “may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ” (Phil 1:10).

2. The Parousia

Joyous Encounter. Seven times Paul refers to the Advent of Christ by means of the term “*Parousia*..”⁶ This word combines the notion of “presence” (Phil 2:12) and “arrival” (1 Cor 16:17; 2 Cor 7:7), with a suggestion of honor given to the coming person. Paul, for example, describes the pleasure afforded by “the coming (*parousia*) of Titus” (2 Cor 7:6).

The technical application of this term to Christ points to the personal and joyous character of the Advent to which the early Christians were looking forward. Christ, who is seated at the right hand of God, is expected to come back personally to earth again with power and glory (1 Thess 4:16) to raise the sleeping saints (1 Cor 15:23; 1 Thess 4:16), to gather His people, both living and dead, unto Himself (2 Thess 2:1; 1 Thess 4:17), and annihilate the adversary (2 Thess 2:8).

The Parousia, then, represents the revelation of Christ's victory through the resurrection and/or translation of the believers, the destruction of the unbelievers and the inauguration of God's Kingdom.

Resurrection and Translation. An essential aspect of the Parousia is the manifestation of the vivifying power of Christ in resurrecting the dead and translating the living (1 Cor 15:42, 51-54). This act represents Christ's final and complete victory over death, because He will destroy the powers of evil. Immediately after mentioning the resurrection, Paul speaks of Christ's “destroying every rule and every authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death” (1 Cor 15:24-26).

With Christ's victory over death and the resurrection or translation of the righteous, the final phase of God's Kingdom will be inaugurated. Christ will admit the redeemed to His eternal presence “and so we shall always be with the Lord” (1 Thess 4:17). The Parousia, then, represents the revelation of Christ's victory through the resurrection and/or translation of the believers, the destruction of the unbelievers and the inauguration of God's Kingdom.

3. The Revelation

The Advent is also described by Paul as the “revelation” of Jesus Christ (1 Cor 1:7; 2 Thess 1:7). The word “revelation” is a translation of the Greek term “*apocalypsis*” which signifies the “unveiling” or “disclosure” of a hidden reality.

Disclosure of Christ's Glory. In the case of Jesus Christ, the hidden reality to be disclosed is His exaltation in the heavenly sanctuary at the right hand of God. It is from there that Christ governs the world and intercedes for mankind (1 Cor 15:25; Phil 2:9). However, Christ's present glorious reign is not evident to the world. Therefore, His Advent will be an *apocalypsis*, a revealing to the world of His present power and glory. Thus, Christians “wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Cor 1:7).

Disclosure of Human Destiny. The future unveiling of Christ is closely associated with the final judgment which discloses both the works and the status of every human being. The Parousia is the moment “when God's righteous judgment will be revealed. For he will render to every man according to his works” (Rom 2:5-6). In a sense, the future revealing of Christ's glory and justice is also “the revealing of the sons of God” (Rom 8:19) because at that time His glory “is to be revealed in us” (Rom 8:18).

Believers who wait for this future disclosure can already experience a foretaste of it through the ministry of the Holy Spirit (Rom 8:18-24). Paul prays that God may give to the believers “a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him” so that they might know “what are the riches of his glorious inheritance” (Eph 1:17-18).

4. The Appearing

Splendor of Advent. Another term employed by Paul to emphasize the majestic and visible aspects of the Advent is the Greek word *epiphaneia*, generally translated “the appearing.”⁷ The term was used in the Hellenistic world especially to describe the triumphant and joyful entrance of a ruler into a city. Paul, who presumably witnessed such joyful royal processions, may well have felt that the term could effectively convey the grandeur of the glorious appearing of Christ at His Parousia.⁸

To the Thessalonians Paul explains that Christ will destroy the lawless one “by his appearing (*epiphaneia*) and his coming (*parousia*)” (2 Thess 2:8). In his epistle to Titus, Paul explicitly speaks of the “blessed hope” as “the

PART FOUR

THE TESTIMONY OF HEBREWS AND JAMES

1. Hebrews

Sacrifice, Service, Glory. The author of Hebrews speaks of the Second Advent in the context of his exposition of the superiority of Christ's redemptive ministry over that of Old Testament priests. Contrary to the continuous sacrifices offered by the Levitical priesthood, Christ "appeared once for all at the end of the age to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself" (Heb 9:26; cf. vv. 12, 28). His great sacrifice gives to Christ the place of glory and honor at the right hand of God (Heb 1:13; 9:24).

The certainty of Christ's past sacrifice, present service, and future glorious manifestation offers the basis for hope.

Christ's entry into the presence of God was not for His own glory but to open the way for us (Heb 10:19, 20; 9:24). The *greatest sacrifice* offered on this earth led to the *greatest service* being offered by Christ in heaven on our behalf. This, in turn, is to be followed by the manifestation of the *greatest glory* when all things will be subjected to Him (Heb 2:8-9). This final triumph will occur when Christ "will appear a second time, not to deal with sin" as such, but to save and glorify "those who are eagerly waiting for him" (Heb 9:28).

A Basis for Hope. A clear distinction is made in Hebrews between the First and Second Advents which are bridged by the heavenly ministry of Christ. The purpose of the First Coming was to deal effectively with the sin problem. The purpose of the Second Coming is "to save," that is, to grant the promised salvation to "those who are eagerly waiting for him" (Heb 9:28).

The certainty of Christ's past sacrifice, present service, and future glorious manifestation offers the basis for hope. Thus, the author urges believers to "hold fast our confidence and pride in our hope" (Heb 3:6; cf. 6:11), "to seize the hope set before us" (Heb 6:18), to "hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, . . . encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near (Heb 10:23,25).

2. James

A Basis for Patience. James deals mostly with matters of practical ethics. His concern is to encourage fellow Christians who had to "meet various trials" (James 1:2; cf. 13-14). Apparently, one of the problems these

appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ" (Titus 2:13). The Parousia will be therefore not a secret event but a glorious visible appearing of the glory of God that will cause the destruction of unbelievers (2 Thess 1:8-9).

Grace and Glory. Paul uses the term "appearing" with reference not only to Christ's Second Advent but also to his First Advent (2 Tim 1:10). The appearing of Christ on this earth was in a sense glorious, since through His incarnation, death, and resurrection He "abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel" (2 Tim 1:10).

At the First Advent there was primarily the appearing of the saving "grace of God." But at the Second Advent there will be especially "the appearing of the *glory* of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ" (Titus 2:11, 13).

The greatest sacrifice offered on this earth led to the greatest service being offered by Christ in heaven on our behalf. This, in turn, is to be followed by the manifestation of the greatest glory when all things will be subjected to Him.

The two manifestations of Christ, the first of grace and the second of glory, are inseparably connected. Those who accept Jesus as their Lord "have loved his appearing" (2 Tim 4:8). They rejoice in the presence of Christ while confidently looking forward to "his appearing and his kingdom" (2 Tim 4:1). The certainty of Christ's glorious appearing is such that Paul appeals to it in his charge to Timothy to live "free from reproach" (1 Tim 6:14) and to fulfill his teaching and preaching ministry (1 Tim 4:12).

Climax of Creation. Like the rest of the New Testament writers, Paul sees the glorious appearing and revelation of Christ at His Parousia as the great event toward which all creation is moving. This event will reveal Christ's sovereignty, His victory over death through the resurrection of the saints, the final separation between the citizens and enemies of the kingdom, the inauguration of God's eternal kingdom, and the manifestation of God's justice and dominion in history.

The Second Advent guarantees that the redemption accomplished by the humble historical Jesus will be consummated at the Return of the glorified Christ. His Advent will transform this physical order and establish God's rule in this world so "that God may be everything to everyone" (1 Cor 15:28).

Christians were experiencing was oppression and exploitation by wealthy persons.

In the context of this social injustice, James encourages the believers saying: “Be patient, therefore, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. Behold, the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, being patient over it until it receives the early and the late rain. You also be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand. Do not grumble, brethren, against one another, that you may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing at the doors” (James 5:7-9).

Wrongs Will be Righted. James’s exhortation indicates that the imminent Coming of the Lord was a living hope that served to motivate Christians to endure patiently some of the wrongs of this present life. Instead of blaming one another for current troubles, believers are encouraged to confirm their faith, knowing that the “Judge is standing at the doors” (James 5:9).

It is obvious that the hope of an imminent Parousia plays an important role in James’s thinking. It can sustain a believer when facing trials and temptations (James 1:2, 12), knowing that soon “he will receive the crown of life” (James 1:12) and the blessing of the kingdom (James 2:5).

James’s exhortation indicates that the imminent Coming of the Lord was a living hope that served to motivate Christians to endure patiently some of the wrongs of this present life.

James’s exhortation speaks to our present situation where sometimes evil is rewarded and good ignored. We are admonished to be patient, confident that the wrongs of this life will be righted when Christ comes back to set up His righteous rule over the world.

PART FIVE

THE TESTIMONY OF JOHN

1. 1 John

The First Epistle of John, like his Gospel, emphasizes the present experience of eternal life: “We have passed out of death into life” (1 John 3:14; cf. 2:25; 5:11, 12, 13). John reassures Christians who were exposed to a false teaching that denied Christ’s incarnation (docetism) and sought salvation through higher light (1 John 2:22; 4:1) that in Christ, God has already given them eternal life: “God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He

who has the Son has life; he who has not the Son of God has not life” (1 John 5:11-12).

Glorifying Hope. Although we have received life and have been born anew (1 John 2:28), we are not yet like Christ. This radical change will occur at His Parousia: “Beloved, we are God’s children now; it does not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure” (1 John 3:2-3).

It is at the Second Advent that believers will attain to their original and ultimate destiny by becoming like Christ.

John distinguished between the First Coming of Christ “to take away sins” (1 John 3:5) and His Second Appearing to glorify the believers. It is at the Second Advent that believers will attain to their original and ultimate destiny by becoming like Christ. (1 John 3:2).

Purifying Hope. Living with the Advent Hope means to live with nothing to hide now, because there will be nothing hidden then. It means living with complete openness to God and to man, knowing that at the Parousia all masks will be removed and all secret things will be revealed. It means to live in the consciousness of Christ’s presence, so that at His Coming we will not shrink back in terror but step forward confidently into His nearer presence: “Abide in him, so that when he appears we may have confidence and not shrink from him in shame at his coming” (1 John 2:28).

The vision of God is the goal and aspiration of all true believers. However, in order to see God, we need the purity of heart that only God can give (Matt 5:8). John explains that the believer who hopes soon to see his Savior “purifies himself as he is pure” (1 John 3:2). Thus, the Blessed Hope has a purifying effect on our lives.

2. Revelation

Centrality of Second Advent. The Day of Christ’s Coming constitutes the fundamental theme around which the whole book of Revelation revolves. The book is introduced as “the revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show to his servants *what must soon take place*” (Rev 1:1).⁹ After the dedication of the book to the seven churches of Asia Minor, John announces in unmistakable terms the nature of this revelation: “Behold, *He is coming* with the clouds,¹⁰ and every eye will see him” (Rev 1:7). The same announcement is

CONCLUSION

found in the last chapter at the conclusion of the revelation received: “Behold, *I am coming soon*” (Rev 22:7, 12).¹¹

The focal point of every vision in Revelation is the Coming of Christ. The visions of the throne, the seven seals, the seven trumpets, the woman, the beast and the Lamb, the seven last plagues, the harlot and Babylon, the destruction of Satan and the establishment of the New Jerusalem, all describe events leading to or following the Coming of Christ.¹²

Various Descriptions. The Second Advent is pictured in Revelation in a variety of ways. In chapter 6, the Parousia is described as a terrifying experience for the wicked, who will call upon mountains and rocks to fall upon them and hide them “from the face of him who is seated on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb” (vv. 15-16).

In chapter 14, the Coming of the Son of Man is represented by the figure of two harvests: the ingathering of the wheat and of the grapes (vv. 14-20). In chapter 19, the Second Coming is pictured as the coming of a Conqueror with the armies of heaven to gain victory over evil by the power of a sharp sword proceeding out of his mouth. His victory is gained not by military might but by the power of His word.

In chapter 20, the positive results of Christ’s Coming are described. These involve first the establishment of a temporal kingdom when the resurrected saints reign with Christ for a period of a thousand years (Rev 20:4), and then the ushering in of God’s eternal kingdom with its new heaven and new earth (Rev 21:1-4).

Source of Comfort. The above examples show how fundamental for John was the hope of Christ’s Coming. This hope was for him not an abstract theological belief, but a constant source of comfort while suffering in exile “on account of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus” (Rev 1:9).

Together with those “who had been slain for the word of God,” John undoubtedly was crying, “O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before thou wilt judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell upon the earth?” (Rev 6:10). The vision of “standing before the throne and before the Lamb” (Rev 7:9) at the Parousia must have given to the aged and honored Apostle the strength to suffer patiently, confident that “on that great day of God’ (Rev 16:14) right would be vindicated and wrong punished.

Prominent Teaching. The belief in the personal Return of Christ figures prominently in the New Testament. We have found that the Gospels report numerous sayings, two long speeches, and several parables of Christ dealing with His glorious Return. In these accounts, Christ presents His future Coming as glorious, visible, imminent, sudden, and personal. The purpose of Christ’s Coming is to vindicate His work universally, to gather all His followers and welcome them into His eternal Kingdom, and to destroy sin and evildoers and thus establish a new world order. Constant readiness for His Return is the keynote that Christ sounds repeatedly. This involves both spiritual preparation and social outreach to the needy.

Variety of Designations. The fundamental importance of Christ’s Advent teaching is emphasized by such New Testament writers as Peter, Paul, James, and John. We have found that they all speak repeatedly and confidently of the certainty of Christ’s Return. The event is described in a variety of ways such as a Day of Salvation, a Day of Judgment, a personal Arrival (Parousia), a terrifying destruction of the wicked and a vivifying, transforming experience of the believers.

Constant readiness for His Return is the keynote that Christ sounds repeatedly. This involves both spiritual preparation and social outreach to the needy.

A variety of imagery is used to describe Christ’s Coming, such as lightning, clouds, trumpets, sharp sickle, harvest, and conquering horseman. These allusive symbols point to the unique and unparalleled nature of the Second Advent—an event that escapes human analogies because it has never been witnessed by human beings. This may explain why Christ and the New Testament writers dwell more on the *why* than on the *how* of the Parousia.

Completion of Redemption. A fundamental reason emphasized in the New Testament for Christ’s Return is to complete the redemptive work begun at His incarnation. Through His First Advent Christ revealed God’s loving and saving purpose. Through His Second Advent He will bring God’s saving purpose to completion.

The life, death, and resurrection of Christ inflicted a decisive defeat on Satan, thus rescuing men and women from the Devil’s dominion and bringing them under His

reign. But it is at His glorious Parousia that Christ will completely and permanently destroy every form of evil and death, resurrect or translate the believers, and inaugurate God's eternal Kingdom.

Goal of History. The Coming of the Son of Man is presented in the New Testament as the event that marks the climax and turning point of the present historical order. It represents God's final invasion into human history for the purpose of establishing a new order where love and justice prevail and where He will reign forever.

The New Testament views the Second Advent as a concrete, genuine event in which there will be a real reunion between a real Savior and a real multitude of redeemed persons. This will be a visible, public, and triumphant manifestation of the Lordship of Christ over this world—a Lordship which is not invisible and confessed by faith.

The Coming of the Son of Man is presented in the New Testament as the event that marks the climax and turning point of the present historical order. It represents God's final invasion into human history for the purpose of establishing a new order where love and justice prevail and where He will reign forever.

The certainty of this Advent Hope rests not on human insights or wishes for a better tomorrow, but on Christ's redemptive accomplishments, on His present ministry in the heavenly sanctuary on behalf of His people, and on the experience of His power and grace in the life of believers. This Blessed Hope has in the past been a source of comfort and motivation for moral and dynamic living to Christians, and is still today a source of encouragement and inspiration to believers called to live among the uncertainties and troubles of this present age.

NOTES

1. C. F. D. Moule emphasizes that the intention of the evangelists was to record for admittedly evangelistic purposes "the plain story of what happened in the ministry of Jesus" ("The Intention of the Evangelists," in *New Testament Essays*, ed. A. J. B. Higgins [Grand Rapids, 1959], p. 176).

2. Other Advent sayings not discussed in this chapter are found in Matt 19:28; Luke 17:22; Matt 10:23; and especially Luke 18:18.

3. For a brief discussion of the various views see George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, 1974), pp. 197-198.

4. This view is developed by C. E. B. Cranfield, "St. Mark 13," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 6 (1953): 297-300.

5. Ralph Earle, *What the Bible Says About the Second Coming* (Grand Rapids, 1973), p. 27.

6. 1 Cor 15:23; 1 Thess 2:19; 3:13; 4:15; 5:23; 2 Thess 2:1, 8.

7. 2 Thess 2:8; 1 Tim 6:14; 2 Tim 4:1, 8; Titus 2:13.

8. Paul was undoubtedly influenced also by the Old Testament language of theophany. The Old Testament looks forward to the day when God will appear in His glory to judge and to establish His Kingdom (Is 2:12-22; 26:31; 35:4; 40:10; Zech 14:5).

9. Emphasis supplied.

10. Emphasis supplied.

11. Emphasis supplied.

12. Rev. 4:8; 6:10, 17; 11:15; 14:14; 16:15, 20; 19:7, 17; 21:11, 21; 22:7, 17.

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