

THE BIBLICAL BASIS OF THE SECOND COMING OF JESUS CHRIST

Dr. Nathaniel M. Fabula

The biblical teaching on the Second Coming of Christ is not being emphasized in many churches today. It may be that many Christians do not entertain the idea that the Lord is coming in our generation because of historical reasons. Past expectations of His coming since the early church failed and caused frustrations to many. Moreover, people in this age have become so pleasure-oriented and materialistic that thoughts of the Kingdom of God are often neglected. We do not watch eagerly for the Lord's return and are prone to think of the "meeting in the air" as a far-off event. We don't like either the thought of having our plans suddenly interrupted by the Lord's return. Such attitudes, however, would not change the absolute certainty of God's accomplishing His divine will and plan for man and the world. Human history has its beginning and its end. It is not a haphazard conglomeration of chance events which are going nowhere. The whole creation moves towards its consummation. His coming again is sure; "for what the Bible PREDICTS and Christ PROMISES, God will PERFORM."

In the New Testament the Second Coming refers to the future, visible return from heaven of Jesus Christ, to raise the dead, hold the last judgment, and set up formally and gloriously the Kingdom of God. The term was used in early church writings (e.g., Justin *Apologetics* 1,52) to distinguish it from the first coming which took place in the incarnation, birth, and earthly career of Christ. Just before Jesus went to the cross and died for the sins of men, He said to His disciples, "I will come again." When the risen Christ ascended to heaven, the first message sent back to earth was the promise, "The same Jesus... will come back..." (Acts 1:9-11).

The message of the return of Jesus Christ is so important that it is mentioned over three hundred times in the New Testament. It is variously mentioned as the coming of the Son of Man (Mt. 24:37,39); the coming of the Lord (1 Thess. 3:13; 5:15; 5:23; 2 Thess. 2:1; James 5:7; 2 Pet. 3:4); the coming of Christ (2 Pet. 1:16); and the day of the Lord (1 Thess. 5:2). The Second Coming is called "the blessed hope" (Tit. 2:13) of the believers as well as the only hope for this chaotic world with all its problems. Man's efforts to bring about a

golden age of universal peace and prosperity are doomed to failure. That day will come only when the Prince of Peace comes to rule and reign in perfect righteousness.

Why is Jesus Christ Coming Again?

Just as God had His purpose in sending His Son nearly two thousand years ago, His coming again is part of God's plan for His creation. From the Scriptures we see the reasons why He will return. Firstly, He is coming to take His church to be with Him forever (1 Thess. 4:16,17; cf. John 14:1-6). Secondly, He is coming to judge the nations (Mt. 25:31-46). Thirdly, He is coming to bring righteous government (Heb. 1:8).

How Is He Coming?

Descriptions of the manner of His coming are found in many places in the New Testament. As the disciples watched Jesus ascending into heaven, they were told by "two men dressed in white," a common description of angels, that the same Jesus who has been taken into heaven will come back in the same way they have seen him go into heaven (Acts 1:9-11). The reference point for the NT doctrine of the Son of Man coming "with the clouds of heaven" is Daniel 7th 13 (cf. Mt. 26:64). If Jesus Christ is returning in the same manner he went to heaven, how can we Filipinos see him when he comes in Jerusalem? If it is possible with men to see events in other countries through television via satellite, how much more with God. There are things that are impossible with man, but with God all things are possible (Mt. 19:26). Jesus himself said, "At that time men will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory. And he will send his angels and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of the heavens" (Mk. 13:26,27; cf. Mt. 24:30,31; 25:31). St. Paul mentions that the Lord's coming will be accompanied "with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God" (1 Thess. 4:16).

When Is He Coming?

This is the crucial question about the Second Coming. There have always been some people who try to fix the day of the Lord's coming. The most recent are the predictions of a certain prophet by the name Bang-ik Ha (Taberah World Mission Phil.) that Jesus is coming again in October 1992 and a Korean named Young Kyun Kim (Mission For the Coming Days) who predicts that it will happen on October 28, 1992 at 11 o'clock in the evening. Do people like them have a biblical basis for setting a date for Christ's coming? From the time of the disciples people have already been wanting to know the exact timetable of the end of the age. What did Jesus tell them and what do the apostles teach on this matter?

4/Jesus Christ is Coming Again!

The disciples asked their Teacher Jesus to tell them the time and sign of his coming and the end of the age (Mt. 24:3). He gave them some signs (Mt. 24:4ff.) but as to the date he categorically answered them saying, "No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father" (Mt. 24:36; cf. Mk. 13:32). After Jesus rose from the grave, they again wanted a kingdom timetable. Jesus emphatically said to them: "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority" (Acts 1:6,7). It is clear that the hour of that event is known to God alone. Therefore, speculation regarding the time of the Second Coming is both foolish and useless. Moreover, it is blasphemous, for he who so speculates is seeking to take from God secrets which belong to Him alone. Man's duty is not to speculate but to prepare himself.

St. Paul in his letter to the Thessalonians did not speculate but reminded the brethren about the shattering suddenness of the event on those who are immersed in material things (1 Thess. 5:1-9). The Lord will come like a thief in the night (v. 2; cf. Mt. 24:43). As in the days of Noah when the people were lost in their eating and drinking and marrying and giving in marriage and were caught unaware by the flood and thereby perished (Mt. 24:38,39). It is forbidden to wish to know the time. But we are to watch for the signs mentioned in the Scriptures, such as, the preaching of the Gospel throughout the whole world (Mt. 24:14); the coming of anti-christs (1 John 2:18); and the fulfillment of God's purpose for the Gentiles (Lk. 21:24). These and other signs have been given but not for the purpose of making detailed sequential predictions. We are commanded to be ready, "because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him" (Mt. 25:44). After teaching the parable of the Ten Virgins, Jesus made this instruction, "Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour" (Mt. 25:13). "The Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him" (Mk. 13:40). The watch of the believers for the return of Christ is not that with terror-stricken fear and shivering apprehension; it is the watch with eager expectation for the coming glory and joy.