

Jesus Christ

is Coming Again!



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A black and white photograph of a person from behind, with their arms raised in a gesture of prayer or praise. The person is wearing a long-sleeved shirt. The background is a bright, cloudy sky, possibly at sunrise or sunset, with light rays breaking through the clouds. The overall mood is one of hope and spiritual longing.

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Egerton C. Long

“ARE YOU READY?”

WHAT’S AHEAD FOR OUR WORLD?

Today, as perhaps never before, many people believe that our whole world is heading towards a major crisis or catastrophe. New words in our vocabulary remind us of drastic changes in the international climate – words such as terrorists, suicide bombers, chemical or nuclear warfare and many others are all too familiar. They emphasize the potential dangers of this critical period. An air of pessimism pervades the hearts and minds of men and women across the world. From the human point of view the future is viewed with a great deal of apprehension.

Today there are very much larger and more devastating bombs available than the one dropped on Hiroshima in 1945. That bomb flattened about 90% of that city and caused the death of 130,000 people. Today’s bombs are much more sophisticated and powerful. Is there any effective defense against long range atomic missiles which a number of countries seem to be stock piling?

INCREDIBLE CHANGES.

Over the last century and especially in recent times, an amazing, almost explosive increase in knowledge and technology has taken place in every field. Speed of communication is at an all time high.

Material wealth and standards of living have never been higher, widening the gap between the 'haves' and the 'have-nots' even further. But one sad by-product of all this has been greater insecurity for many people, both young and old. The relentless pace of our modern society has introduced new terminology or changed the use of so many words. 'Drop out' has new and often tragic meanings today. The word 'drugs' now has almost a sinister meaning.

IS THERE ANY ALTERNATIVE?

WHAT COULD BE AHEAD?

Against that dark, discouraging description, a writer in a Christian magazine set out an encouraging alternative: 'In such times as these the position of the believer in Jesus Christ stands out bright and clear. He/she is privileged to know, not only the nature of the approaching crisis, but its purpose, sequence and outcome.

We have the prophetic message of the Bible and we believe that the great body of prophetic teaching has been given for just such days of fear and anxiety as these.'

The result is that while the rest of the world may live in darkness and despair, those who read, study and believe the Bible as the Word of God, live in light and hope and are ready for whatever may happen in the future.

WHAT IS NEXT ON GOD'S PROGRAM?

What is the next great event in God's program for this world? What does the Bible say? Where does Jesus Christ fit into the overall picture?

The Bible has many answers to these questions. But one great fact stands out clearly: In God's program the next major event for this world is **the return of God's Son, Jesus Christ from Heaven to this earth**. That return will involve several successive stages, but all those events are part of God's program and they cluster around the second coming of Jesus Christ.

A DEFINITION

By the 'second coming of Christ', we mean His actual, literal and personal appearance from Heaven, first in the air to take away His Church, the true believers, and then later to come in judgment and finally to reign over all.

Judgments, transformations, resurrections, rewards and other major events will take place at that time and will all be part of God's plan and program.

Is it possible for all this to happen? The Bible says so. Today we have become familiar with men and space shuttles orbiting the earth. We use e-mail to reach across the world. The internet has opened up previously unheard of avenues of knowledge. So why couldn't Christ

come again? Is anything too hard for God to bring about in His time and way? (Genesis 18:14) There are 318 references in the New Testament to the fact that Christ will return. God has left us in no doubt that this tremendous event will take place in His time.

THREE REMARKABLE PROMISES

While Jesus Christ was here on earth, He made a number of promises. At least three of them concerned major events or actions regarding Himself. Each was very specific and two of them have already been fulfilled. The third is awaiting God's timing.

Those promises were:

1. He spoke on a number of occasions regarding the death of His physical body, but frequently added as a promise: 'I will rise again'. John 2:19, Matthew 16:21, Mark 9:31. **He did exactly that. He rose again on the third day as He had promised.**
2. He spoke about a new organisation and called it 'the church'. He promised: 'I will build My Church.' Matthew 16:18. **He has done exactly that and is continuing to do so.**
3. He said, 'I will come again.' John 14:3. If Christ fulfilled those first two promises, surely we must believe He will fulfill this third one also. What was His promise?

He promised He would come again, visibly, personally and unexpectedly.

When He comes, He will be in His glorified body in which He returned to Heaven after His death and resurrection. When He comes, the Church will be complete and from then on will be with Him forever. Don't you feel like shouting 'Hallelujah'?

OTHER PROMISES CONCERNING CHRIST'S RETURN.

The angels who came from Heaven just as Christ was returning to Heaven, made a remarkable statement and promise to the lonely disciples who were standing on the Mt. of Olives. They said: 'This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into Heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen Him go into Heaven.' (Acts 1:11) That promise came as a wonderful encouragement to those disciples and changed their whole outlook for the days immediately ahead of them.

Not all biblical scholars agree on the details or program of our Lord's return, but the broad outline is quite clear. It is unhelpful to let these differences distract us from the overall picture – Christ, the King of Kings, is coming. He will return in God's own time and manner.

THE PROMISES THROUGH THE APOSTLES

In the New Testament every writer speaks of Christ's coming again as our future hope and the great climax of God's plan of redemption by which man can be reconciled to God through Christ, now and for all Eternity.

Paul devotes large sections of at least four epistles to this theme – 1 Corinthians 15:1-58, 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, 2 Thessalonians 1:7-10 and chapter 2 of the same epistle.

2 Timothy 3 gives more than twenty 'signs' preceding Christ's return.

Peter says that the day of the Lord will come as a 'thief comes in the night' (2 Peter 3:1-14). John speaks with joy of His return. (1 John 3:2&3) James writes of His coming. It is the all absorbing theme of Jude and again of John in the Book of Revelation. So much of the New Testament points forward to Christ coming again.

The Second Coming of Christ is the plain teaching of the Word of God. As one writer said; 'If the Bible teaches anything definitely and distinctly, it is that the Lord Jesus, who was taken up visibly and bodily from Mount Olivet into Heaven, is coming again visibly and bodily. We shall not merely feel His spiritual presence

near us; we shall see Him as distinctly as the disciples saw Him as He stood talking with them on Mount Olivet.'

THE PROGRAM OF CHRIST'S COMING

Christ spoke plainly about the fact of His return but it was left to the apostle Paul, guided by the Holy Spirit, to write down for us the details or program of the glorious event.

Paul's statements in two passages (1 Corinthians 15:51-58 and 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18) connect a resurrection with Christ's coming. Paul also states there will be two distinct groups of believers which will come together at that moment. They are:

1. The saints from Heaven, whose souls will come with Christ and will join up with their new resurrected bodies.
2. The living saints – all from earth, who will be changed at His coming.

Paul also gives the order in which these events will happen:

1. There is a shout – 'the Lord Himself will descend from Heaven with a shout' (1 Thess. 4:16). What will He shout? 'Come?' Each of the three people Christ raised from the dead when He was on earth responded to His voice. Will it be the same at His return? Is 'come' one of God's favourite words?

The Greek word for 'shout' used here is a command which expects and demands obedience. Is this a call to the saints in Heaven or to the angels to move forward? Or as we have said - is it directed to the dead bodies of the saints whose spirits are already in Heaven? Does it include the believers here on earth also? 'Come!'

2. The archangel speaks in verse 16. We are not told what he will say. No doubt he will echo Christ's command to 'come'.
3. The trumpet of God will be sounded. (v16) A trumpet was used continuously during Israel's wanderings to convey the will of God to the distant tents so that all moved out together. (Numbers 10) It meant: 'Be ready to move'.

THREE MIRACLES AT HIS COMING

In the program of events at Christ's coming there are three remarkable miracles which we have mentioned briefly already. They illustrate for us the **power of His coming**. Putting together the passages in 1 Corinthians and 1 Thessalonians we can see there will be:

1. **Instant resurrection.** 'The dead in Christ will rise first.' (1 Thessalonians 4:15,16) The saints in Heaven now know the redemption of their souls. Then they will know the redemption and resurrection of their bodies also.

2. Instant change for the living. That resurrection will be followed by the calling away of the believers from earth together with an instantaneous change in their earthly bodies. 1 Corinthians 15:51 uses the phrase: 'in the twinkling of an eye' meaning the shortest possible moment of time. Bodies will be changed without going through the process we call death because our earthly bodies would never suit the environment of eternity. All believers in Christ will receive a heavenly body through one or other of these two miracles.

3. Instant rapture. Earthly believers will be 'caught up' (1 Thess 4:17). Both groups will meet in the air and will be with the Lord. Think of it – the whole church together with Christ! The words 'meet the Lord' mean to stand opposite or meet face to face.

All this takes place 'in the air'. Again the Greek word has an interesting meaning. It speaks of the air immediately around us – not the upper atmosphere, but the lower air of our own world. From there the Church, the Bride of Christ, physically and visibly complete for the first time will go on into the glory of the Father's Home. What a moment! What will happen next?

THE JUDGMENT SEAT OF CHRIST

Why not call this a 'prize giving day for believers'? This is a place of rewards as well as examination. The Bible clearly teaches the accountability of believers. (2 Cor 5:10, Rev 22:12) But this is not a judgment for sin. That took place at Calvary. This is a judgment for service. We will have to give an account of the way we used our gifts, our opportunities as well as our motives in our service for Christ. But remember: Christ will be looking for what He can reward and who loves you more than Jesus Christ?

What will follow? A very special event, called 'The marriage supper of the Lamb'. (Ephesians 5:22-27, Rev 19:7-9) It is the final eternal uniting of Christ with the Church as His bride.

WHEN WILL ALL THIS TAKE PLACE? WHEN IS CHRIST COMING?

Our answer has to be: 'We do not know the exact time of Christ's return.' Many people have tried to set dates, saying Christ would come on a certain day or in a particular year. Every time the supposed date has been proven wrong and Christ did not come.

Christ Himself gave two answers to this question. On the one hand He said plainly: 'No man knows about that day or the hour, not even the angels in Heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.' Mark 13:32. In the wonderful interaction of the

Trinity, the Son is waiting for the command of the Father before He returns to our world.

As part of His second answer, Christ also gave a number of signs regarding world affairs and the behaviour of mankind in the period closest to His return. While He was here on earth He was astounded by the inability of the so-called religious leaders to recognise prophetic signs and their fulfillment. He said they were 'good weather prophets' (Matthew 16:2) but could not read the signs of the days in which they lived. Would He say the same about His people today?

WHAT WERE THE SIGNS HE TOLD US TO LOOK FOR?

In Matthew 24 and in Luke 21, the disciples asked Christ; 'What will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?' Christ replied by saying that one of the signs of the last days will be an intensified increase in the number of 'false prophets'. Luke adds an important detail (21:8) 'Many will come in my name, claiming 'I am he and the time is near.' Christ added: 'Do not follow them.' Last century saw the multiplication of false cults, all claiming to have the truth or to have some fresh revelation from God. Many have majored on prophecy concerning Christ's return as Christ predicted they would. 'Do not follow them.'

There always have been false prophets of course, even in the early Church. But Christ indicated that as the end draws near, they would suddenly begin to multiply. Satan knows what will attract people and uses man's natural curiosity to capture their attention, including some true believers, sad to say. This will increase as the world rushes on toward the end of the age.

GLOBAL CONDITIONS

The next sign Christ pointed to in answering the disciples' question related to world conditions. We could call this 'global conflict'. War between nations has always occurred, century after century. But never has there been the tremendous unrest, ferment and conflict existing almost everywhere today. A recent newspaper article listed over 120 countries where it might not be safe to travel today because of health problems, internal unrest or external conflict. It would seem that this must generally increase in the days ahead.

The revival of Israel and the return of the Jewish people to Palestine is certainly another indicator of the end times. Christ, when answering the disciples' question, used a parable about the fig tree. He said: 'when you see new leaves on a tree, you know the meaning.' Now the fig tree has always been one of the figures of speech for Israel. (The vine and the olive tree are the other two.)

Was Christ saying that when we see the Jewish people evolving as a nation again, we can believe that the generation living then will see the final days of this world? In 1897 Zionism was started. In 1917 Palestine was declared a home for the Jewish people. In 1948 a Jewish Government was set up in Palestine and several million Jews reside in that country today, drawn from all over the world. This is in spite of the Arab-Jewish conflict. Is the fig tree budding? Jesus Himself said: 'Jerusalem will be trampled on by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.' (Luke 21:24)

THREE RETURNS PROMISED

There are three returns of the Jewish people promised in the scriptures. The first was the return from Egypt under Moses. The second was the return from Babylon under Ezra and others. The third is the return promised in Isaiah 11:11 when the Jewish people will be gathered from across the world and the way will be opened for Christ to set up His Kingdom. Many verses in that chapter describe the millennial period. But we believe that Christ will return and call away His church before this setting up of His kingdom here on earth. So this preliminary re-gathering of Israel to Palestine is possibly yet another sign that these are the closing days before He comes.

CONDITIONS IN THE CHURCH AND THE WORLD

In Luke 17:26-8 Christ compared conditions before His return with the days of both Noah and Lot: 'Life will be just the same as it was in the days of Lot.' (J.B. Phillips) Those days were characterized by sexual perversion, gang rape, homosexuality, violence and lawlessness. These things are not new but over the last generation or two it seems there has been an extraordinary flood of them which has taken over the world. The spread of AIDS in undeveloped countries can be traced to this immoral flood. Is this part of the final fulfillment of the prophecies Christ made regarding the days before His return?

Paul issued several strong warnings concerning the state of the Church immediately before Christ returns. In 1 Timothy 4:1 he wrote: 'The Spirit clearly says that in later times, some will abandon the faith.' Both Peter and Jude also tell us that in the last days, there will be many in the Church who will turn away from the revealed truth as found in the Bible and turn to various forms of teaching; all contradictory to the foundational truths taught by Christ and the apostles. Again this can be clearly seen in many churches and denominations across the world today. There are many who will not recognise, for example, the Virgin Birth of Jesus. Or they can explain away what we call the miracles

Christ performed. Even the resurrection of Jesus Christ is denied by many who stand in church pulpits week by week. Is this another indicator of the 'last days'?

OTHER SIGNS PREDICTED BY CHRIST

Christ told his disciples: 'You will hear of wars and rumors of wars. For nation will rise against nation and kingdom against kingdom. There will be famines and earthquakes in various places.' (Matthew 24:6-7) One historian said there have been over 350 wars since the end of World War II. Millions are serving in the standing armies of the world and the expenditure on weapons is beyond all imagination. Many smaller countries seem continually involved in internal conflict.

Again we are reminded frequently about the famine areas of our world. India, China and much of Southeast Asia as well as countries in Africa are tragically devastated by famine. Many countries are completely unable to feed their own people. With the dramatic increase in the world's population, millions of people are facing starvation. Enormous areas of good agricultural land have been lost by erosion or other similar reasons. Is all this just a coincidence or is it another sign of the 'last days'?

WHAT IS OUR POSITION TODAY?

Where do the Church, its pastors, and members fit into this picture? Simply the church ought to

be like an announcer at an airport – the person who knows what will happen next – ‘Attention please, flight #527 is now ready for departure.’ We could say the Church should be the world’s information officer, but sad to say the Church doesn’t always realise this. While the rest of the world may be in darkness, the Church should be walking in the Light because we have the Word of God – called ‘a light shining in a dark place until the day dawns.’ (2 Peter 1:19) That is our position. That is our responsibility and opportunity. How much time do we have left before Christ comes?

CHRIST’S RETURN – THE GREAT DIVIDER

The Bible teaches that life will be going on normally when Christ suddenly appears. (Luke 17:34-36) But it also teaches that His coming will divide the world of mankind as nothing else except death has ever done. Two classes of people will be directly affected by the unannounced return of Jesus Christ. Those two classes will be believers and unbelievers. In which group are you?

For the believer – Christ’s coming will mean the complete realisation of all that Christ made possible at Calvary. Now we know in part, now we see as in a hazy mirror, then everything will be clear. Best of all we will be with Christ and we will see Him face to face.

What if a believer is out of fellowship with Christ when He comes? John warns us to 'continue in Him, so that when He appears, we may be confident and unashamed at His coming.' Does that say anything to you and me today? How is our fellowship with Him? Is there anything between us that needs to be confessed and put away? Let's do it today, while there is time.

For the unbeliever – he or she will be left behind here on earth when Christ calls away the believers. They will face the terror of the great Tribulation period and the rise of the Anti-Christ. Yes, there may be those who will be saved during that time but they will surely face great difficulty and even persecution in those dark days on earth.

For those who have never received Christ, there will be the final judgment and the eternal separation from Christ and all that God has prepared for those who love Him. Where does this find you? What will Christ's return mean to you?

Do you know Christ now? Have you received Him as your Saviour? He is waiting for you to turn to Him. He will make your life complete and you will be saved from the destruction and the wrath of God to come.

If you know Christ, are you in fellowship with Him? How long since you told Him you love Him? What will His coming mean to you? Jesus is coming.

Are you ready to meet Him?

What should your attitude be?

Look for Him, live for Him, labour for Him.

WHAT IS YOUR RESPONSE?

HOW TO RECEIVE JESUS AS YOUR SAVIOUR

If God has been speaking to you as you have read this booklet and if you are willing now to take Jesus Christ as your Saviour, here is what you should do:

Confess – tell God in your own simple words that you are a sinner, needing a Saviour. (Read Romans 3:23)

Accept – tell God that you see Jesus Christ your only Saviour and will accept Him now. (Read Romans 6:23)

Believe – that Jesus Christ has saved you because you asked Him to do so. (Read Romans 10:13)

If you have made this decision today then sign your name here and tell someone else what you have done. Join a church where you can hear God's Word preached and have fellowship with other believers.

I acknowledge myself to be a sinner in God's sight.

I accept Jesus Christ now as my Saviour.

I thank Him for saving me.

Date _____/_____/_____

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