

Isaiah 11:1-2,10-12 (Cyrus Ingerson Scofield) 122094

Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth: Ten Outline Studies of the More Important Divisions of Scripture, Two Advents

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Whoever carefully considers Old Testament prophecies must be struck by two seemingly contradictory lines of prediction concerning the coming Messiah. One body of prediction speaks of Him as coming in weakness and humiliation, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, a root out of dry ground, having no form nor comeliness, nor beauty that He should be desired. His visage is to be marred, His hands and feet pierced. He is to be forsaken of man and of God, and to make His grave with the wicked (Isa. 53; 7:14; Psa. 22:1-18; Dan. 9:26; Zech. 13:6-7; Mark 14:27).

The other line of prophecy foretells a splendid and resistless Sovereign purging the earth with awful judgments, regathering dispersed Israel, restoring the throne of David in more than Solomon's splendor, and introducing a reign of profound peace and perfect righteousness (Isa. 11:1-2,10-12; Dt. 30:1-7; 24:21-23; 40:9-11; Jer. 23:5-8; Dan. 7:13-14; Matt. 1:1; 2:2; Luke 1:31-33).

In due time the fulfillment of Messianic prophecy began with the birth of the virgin's Son (Isa. 9:6) in Bethlehem (Mic. 5:2) and proceeded with perfect literalness unto the full accomplishment of every prediction of Messiah's humiliation. But the Jews would not receive their King, "meek and sitting upon an ass," but instead crucified Him (Zech. 9:9; Matt. 21:1-5; John 19:15-16).

But we must not conclude that the wickedness of man has baffled the deliberate purpose of God, for His counsels include a second advent of His Son, when the predictions concerning Messiah's earthly glory will receive the same precise and literal fulfillment as did those which concerned His earthly sufferings (Hos. 3:4-5; Luke 1:31-33; Acts 1:6-7; 15:14-17; Matt. 24:27-30).

The Jews were slow of heart to believe all that the prophets had spoken concerning the sufferings of their Messiah; we are slow of heart to believe all that they have spoken concerning His glory. Surely the greater reproach is ours, for it ought to be easier to believe that the Son of God would come "in the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory," than that He would come as the babe of Bethlehem, and the Carpenter of Nazareth. Indeed, we believe the latter because it has happened, not because the prophets foretold it, and it is time we ceased to reproach the Jews for their unbelief.

If it be asked how they could possibly be blinded to the evident meaning of so many predictions, the answer is that they were blinded in the same way that many Christians are blinded to the equally evident meaning of a far greater number of predictions of His earthly glory, by the process of "spiritualizing" Scripture. In other words, the ancient scribes told the people that the prophecies of Messiah's sufferings were not to be interpreted literally, just as some modern scribes are telling the people today that the prophecies of Messiah's earthly glory are not to be literally interpreted.

But the second advent is a promise to the Church as well as the Jew. Among the last words of comfort addressed by our Lord to His perplexed disciples before He was sacrificed on the cross were these: "Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto Myself; that where I am there ye may be also" (John 14:1-3).

Here the Lord speaks of His coming again in precisely the same terms as of His departure. If His departure was personal and bodily, His coming again must be likewise, since there is no Scripture that indicates otherwise.

In the very moment of our Lord's disappearance from the sight of His disciples, "two men stood by them in white apparel; which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen Him go into heaven" (Acts 1:10-11).

Of the same significance is 1 Thess. 4:16-17: "For the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air; and so shall we ever be with the Lord."

"Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ" (Titus 2:13).

"Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when He shall appear, we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is" (1 John 3:2).

For this "blessed hope" we are taught to "watch" (Mark 13:33, 35, 37; Matt. 24:42; 25:13), to "wait" (1 Thess. 1:10), "and be ready" (Matt. 24:44). The last prayer in the Bible, "Even so, come, Lord Jesus," is one for Christ's speedy return (Rev. 22:20).

These Scriptures make it clear that the second advent will be personal and bodily. Therefore it does not mean the death of the believer, nor the destruction of Jerusalem, nor the descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, nor the gradual diffusion of Christianity; but that it is the "blessed hope" of the Church, the time when sleeping saints will be raised, and, together with saints then living, who will be "changed" (1 Cor. 15:51-52), caught up to meet the Lord the time when we who are now the sons of God will be like Him, and when faithful saints will be rewarded for works done after salvation, for His name's sake.

The following Scriptures contrast the two advents of our Lord.

First Advent

"And she brought forth her first-born son, and wrapped Him in swaddling clothes, and laid Him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn" (Luke 2:7).

"But now once in the end of the world hath He appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself" (Heb. 9:26).

"For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10).

"For God sent not His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved" (John 3:17).

Second Advent

"And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory" (Matt. 24:30).

"So Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for Him shall He appear the second time without sin unto salvation" (Heb. 9:28).

"And to you who are troubled, rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Thess. 1:7-8).

"Because He hath appointed a day, in the which He will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom He hath ordained; whereof He hath given assurance unto all men, in that He hath raised Him from the dead" (Acts 17:31).

Enough has been presented to show that both the promises to Israel and to the Church imperatively require a return of our Lord to the earth. It may be helpful to consider, briefly, the theories which are here and there put forward to oppose the scriptural doctrine of the personal and bodily second advent of Christ.

It will, of course, be clearly understood that the Scriptures which speak of His visible and bodily appearing at the close of this dispensation of grace must be distinguished from those which refer to His divine attributes of omniscience and omnipresence, by virtue of which He is with us always, even unto the end of the age.

But the man Christ Jesus is now personally and bodily at the right hand of God: "But he (Stephen)... looked up steadfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God" (Acts 7:55). Heb. 1:3 further points out that Jesus, "when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the majesty on high." Then Col. 3:1 tells us, "If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God."

To illustrate, consider the movement of General Von Moltke during the Franco-Prussian War. By his genius, skill and a network of telegraph wires, he was present on every battlefield, though visibly and personally present in his office in Berlin. Later in the war, he joined the army outside of Paris, after which his actual and visible presence was there. So our Lord, by virtue of His divine attributes, is present with His Church now, but He will be visibly and personally present upon the earth at His second coming.

Answers to Six Theories Opposing the Second Advent

1. The prophecies concerning the return of the Lord were not fulfilled by the descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, nor by His manifestation in powerful revivals and prayer meetings, because:

a. This interpretation practically nullifies the doctrine of the Trinity, making the Holy Spirit only a manifestation of Christ.

b. In Christ's promise of the descent of the Spirit, He distinctly speaks of Him as "another Comforter" (John 14:16), and in John 16:7 Christ says, "If I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send Him unto you."

c. The inspired writers of the Acts, the Epistles, and the Revelation, mention the return of the Lord more than one hundred and fifty times, after Pentecost, and always as yet future.

d. None of the events predicted to accompany the second advent of Christ occurred at Pentecost. These are: the resurrection of sleeping saints (1 Cor. 15:22-23; 1 Thess. 4:13-16); the "change" of living believers, by which they "put on incorruption" their "vile bodies" being "fashioned like unto His glorious body," and their being caught up to meet the Lord in the air (1 Cor. 15:51-53; 1 Thess. 4:17; Phil. 3:20-21); and the mourning of all the tribes of the earth because of the visible coming of the Son of man in power and great glory (Matt. 24:29-30; Rev. 1:7).

These are the phenomena associated with the event of our Lord's return. When He comes these phenomena will be present. Not one of these things occurred at Pentecost, nor in any other manifestation of the Holy Spirit.

2. The conversion of a sinner is not the coming of the Lord. One would think this theory too silly to be seriously put forth as an explanation of prophecies so numerous and circumstantial.

a. According to Scripture this is exactly reversed. Conversion is the coming of a sinner to Christ, not the coming of Christ to a sinner (Matt. 11:28; John 5:40; 6:37; 7:37).

b. None of the events enumerated above, predicted to occur when the Lord returns, accompany the conversion of a sinner.

3. The death of a Christian is not the coming of Christ.

a. When the disciples understood the Lord to say that one of their number should tarry until He came, the saying went abroad among them that "that disciple should not die" (John 21:22-24).

b. The inspired writers always refer to a believer's death as his departure. In not one instance is the coming of the Lord connected with a Christian's death (Phil. 1:23; 2 Tim. 4:6; 2 Cor. 5:8). Dying Stephen saw the heavens opened, and the Son of man, not coming, but "standing on the right hand of God" (Acts 7:55).

c. None of the events predicted to occur when the Lord returns accompany the death of a Christian.

4. The destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans was not the second coming of Christ.

a. In Matt. 24 and Luke 21, three events are foretold: the destruction of the temple, the coming of the Lord, and the end of the world (age). The confusion of these perfectly distinct things gave rise to the notion that the fulfillment of one was the fulfillment of all.

b. The Apostle John wrote the Revelation after the destruction of Jerusalem, but still speaks of the coming as a future event (Rev. 1:4, 7; 2:25; 3:11; 22:7,12, 20). The last promise of the Bible is, "Surely, I come quickly." The last prayer of the Bible is, "Even so, come, Lord Jesus."

c. None of the events predicted to occur when the Lord returns occurred when Jerusalem was destroyed (1 Thess. 4:14-17; Matt. 24:29-31; Matt. 25:31-32).

5. The diffusion of Christianity is not the second coming of Christ.

a. The diffusion of Christianity is gradual, whereas the Scriptures refer to the return of the Lord as sudden and unexpected (Matt. 24:27,44, 50, 36-42; 2 Peter 3:10; Rev. 3:3).

b. The diffusion of Christianity is a process; Scripture invariably speaks of the return of the Lord as an event.

c. The diffusion of Christianity brings salvation to the wicked, whereas the coming of Christ is said to bring, not salvation, but "sudden destruction" (1 Thess. 5:2-3; 2 Thess. 1:7-10; Matt. 25:31-46).

6. These alleged explanations and theories, though widespread, do not appear in the books of reputable theologians of any school or denomination, nor are they maintained by any recognized critical explanation of the Bible. These all maintain the bodily and visible second coming of Christ.

It is, however, sometimes said that this coming cannot occur until after the world has been converted by the preaching of the gospel, and has submitted to the spiritual reign of Christ for one thousand years. This view is wholly erroneous for the following reasons:

a. Scripture clearly describes the condition of the earth at the second coming of Christ to be one of awful wickedness (Luke 17:26-32; Gen. 6:5-7; Gen. 13:13; Luke 18:8; 21:25-27).

b. Scripture describes the whole course of this dispensation from the beginning to the end in such terms as to exclude the possibility of a converted world in any part of it (Matt. 13:47, 50, 36-43; 25:1-10; 1 Tim. 4:1; 2 Tim. 3:1-9; 4:3-4; 2 Peter 3:3-4; Jude 17-19).

c. The purpose of God in this dispensation is declared to be, not the conversion of the world, but to "gather out of the Gentiles a people for His name." After this He "will return," and only then will the world be converted (Acts 15:14-17; Matt. 24:14 ["for a witness"]; Rom. 1:5 ["among" not "of" all nations]; Rom. 11:14 ["some" not "all"]; 1 Cor. 9:22; Rev. 5:9 ["out of not "all" of]).

d. It would be impossible to "watch" and "wait" for an event which we knew could not occur for more than one thousand years.

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