

**Summer 2014 Newsletter**  
**Detroit Bible Students Ecclesia**  
**P.O. Box 51, Southfield, MI 48037-0051**  
**biblenewsletter.org**



## The Return of Christ

***"Tell us, when will these things be? and what will be the sign of your coming, and of the end of the age?" Matthew 24:3 NKJV***

Of all the hopes cherished by the Apostles and the early church, the foremost was the return of the Lord to set up his kingdom. During his lifetime, Jesus taught the people to look forward to the kingdom. (Luke 8:1; Matthew 4:23; 9:35) He taught his disciples to pray, "thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." (Matthew 6:10) He spoke many parables designed to give his disciples an understanding of the kingdom (Matthew 13:24, 31,33,44,45,47;20:1)

The disciples ardently expected the fulfillment of the kingdom promises. Therefore, great was their confusion when Jesus was arrested and crucified. The two disciples on the way to Emmaus expressed their dismay by saying, "we trusted that it had been he which should have redeemed Israel." (Luke 24:21) When they became convinced that Jesus had been resurrected, their hopes revived so their last question of him before his ascension was "Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?" (Acts 1:6)

Thus the establishment of Christ's kingdom was at the center of all the teachings of Jesus and of his Apostles, (Acts 8:12; 20:25; 28:31) and the Apostles encouraged the brethren to look to the return of the Lord for the fruition of

their hopes. Jesus' promise that he would return was a treasured doctrine in the early church. (1 Thessalonians 2:19; 3:13; 5:23; James 5:7,8; 2 Peter 1:16; 1 Timothy 6:14; Revelation 22:7)

As the centuries passed and the Church grew in prominence in the world, the avid anticipation of the Lord's return began to fade. The Papacy declared that it was the kingdom of God on earth and the Pope was Christ's Vicegerent. Christians, worn down by time and persecution, and bedazzled by the Roman church's power, began to accept the new teaching. Since Bibles were in the possession of monks and priests, locked up in Latin or Greek, dead languages to all but the specially educated, and general education was unknown, the masses had little recourse but to believe what they were told. The Dark Ages were indeed dark!

In the dawning of the 19th Century, after nearly three centuries of painful reformation, Bible Societies came into being and the Scriptures became available to all people in their own languages. Along with this, universal public education gave people the ability to read the new Bibles. And, the long overlooked doctrine of the Second Advent was resurrected.

At the time of Jesus' first advent, the scripture tells us that "the people were in expectation" of the Christ. (Luke 3:15) Yet when he walked among them, why didn't they recognize him? Their expectations were wrong. The questions the disciples asked Jesus demonstrated that Messiah was expected to be a great general or a great king like David who would free them from the Roman yoke and re-establish their kingdom glory.

The people flocked to Jesus to hear his gracious teachings (John 7:46) and to be healed, but the religious rulers saw him as a threat to their position and hated him. Jesus asked his disciples "Whom do men say that I the Son of man am? And they said, Some say that thou art John the Baptist: some, Elias; and others, Jeremias, or one of the prophets." Jesus then asked them, "But whom say ye that I am? And Simon Peter answered...Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." Jesus responded "Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven." (Matthew 16:13-17) Human reasoning alone was not adequate to recognize in this humble man who had no position, no army, not even a place of his own to lay his head, God's Anointed. (Matthew 8:20)

When the doctrine of the Lord's return was revived by William Miller in the 1800's, it was soon discredited when the predictions of the Millerites were shown to be incorrect. When Jesus failed to appear on the mountain top as expected, embarrassment and great disappointment resulted. Today, few churches spend time teaching the second coming of Christ, and those that do, offer fantastic scenarios of planes crashing and cars becoming driverless while believers float upwards into heaven.



Are these ideas scriptural? What is the reason for Christ's return and what should we expect? What do the Scriptures say?

Matthew 24 contains the definitive prophecy of the second advent. The disciples asked Jesus, "Tell us, when will these things be? And what will be the sign of your coming, and of the end of the age?" (NKJV) It is important to note that the word "coming" is not a precise translation of the Greek word *parousia* found in this text. *Parousia* means literally "presence." It is the same word used in Philippians 2:12 in which Paul speaks of his presence and absence with

the Philippian brethren. What the disciples asked Jesus, and what Jesus described, were the signs that would demonstrate that he had already returned.

It is worthy of note that Jesus did not give the disciples one stunning event to look for. Instead he gave them a series of events that would indicate that he had returned.

The prophecy begins with a running account of the experiences of the Christian church throughout the Gospel age. Without telling them it would be centuries before his return, he hinted at the length of time by saying, "the gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations" before the end would come. (vs.14)

The prophecy is long and detailed, so we will pick up only a few significant points. Jesus said "great tribulation" such as was never before known in the world, such that "if it were not shortened no flesh would be saved," (vss.21,22) would be a sign he had returned. This also agrees with Revelation 11:15-18 which says "the nations were angry" because of Christ's reign There have always been "wars and rumors of wars" (vs.6) but this trouble differs in that man would then be able to cause his own extinction.



The time would also be a period of general ignorance of what world events portend just as in "the days of Noah" when the people were "eating, drinking, marrying and giving in marriage," normal everyday activities, "and knew not until the flood came and took them all away; so shall also the coming (*parousia*, presence) of the Son of man be." (vss. 37-39) Jesus himself asked, "when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?" (Luke 18:8) This is a rhetorical question. Jesus knew the answer—very little if any at all.

The darkening of the sun and moon symbolize a time of secularism, agnosticism, faithlessness, and disregard for the Gospel light and the Law of God—A time when a social gospel would replace the Gospel of the Kingdom and humanism would override the truth of God's word.

Another marker is given in verses 32 and 33. "Now learn a parable of the fig tree; When his branch is yet tender, and putteth forth leaves, ye know that summer is nigh; So likewise ye, when ye shall see all these things, know that it

is near (*eggus*, at hand), even at the doors." The fig tree is used in scripture to represent the nation of Israel. (Jeremiah 24; Hosea 9:10) Thus the Lord was telling his disciples to watch Israel for a time when it would once again come to life.

It is important to establish the relationship of the Second Advent to the First. Jesus came the first time to give his life a ransom for man. (1 Timothy 2:6; Hebrews 2:9; 10:10-13) On the way to Emmaus, Jesus reproved his disciples for failing to understand that he came to die and showed them how all the scriptures prophesied of his death. (Luke 24:25-27) Thus, the First Advent was for the purpose of purchasing man from death. The Second Advent follows the First as Cause and Effect. Having purchased mankind, Jesus returns to establish the Kingdom for which he taught his followers to pray.

The resurrected Jesus is no longer a human being. His human nature was given to ransom Adam and his race out from death. (John 6:51; 1 Timothy 2:6; Hebrews 10:5,10) Because his disciples would seal their testimony of him with their lives, it was necessary that his disciples be convinced of his resurrection, so the Lord assumed bodies by which he could appear to them, just as the angels who visited Abraham did. (Genesis 18) In all but one instance, the disciples recognized Jesus only by some familiar act, word, or repetition of a miracle, not by sight. (Luke 24:13:31; John 20:19, 26, 30; 21:1-7) To Thomas he appeared as they had last seen him, but with a mild rebuke for his doubts. Even then he appeared and disappeared suddenly in a closed room. (John 20:26-29) Lastly, he appeared to Saul on the road to Damascus as a light brighter than the noonday sun. (Acts 9:1-5; 22:1-11) The Apostles in their epistles to the church affirmed that Jesus was no longer human. (2 Corinthians 5:15,16; 1 Corinthians 15:47; Hebrews 1:2,3; 1 John 3:2; 1 Peter 3:18 NASB)

On the eve of his crucifixion Jesus told his disciples, "I will come again," but he also said, "Yet a little while, and the world seeth me no more;" (John 14:3,19) The common conception of his return is based upon Revelation 1:7 "Behold, he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him: and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him," and Acts 1:11; "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." From these two scriptures the idea of a stunning visual event is inferred even though Jesus never mentioned such a thing in his own prophecy. This scenario presents some difficult questions. How can one see through clouds? Where will this happen? and What does Jesus look like?

To see a celestial event, clouds are the last thing you would want. Clouds would obscure the scene as they did in the Acts 1 account. The cloud "received [Jesus] out of their sight." (vs.9) With cloud cover, and with the curvature of the earth, how could "every eye" possibly literally see the Lord?

Clouds are often used in scripture to denote trouble. Joel 2:1-6 and Zephaniah 1:14,15 describe the day of the Lord as one of "clouds and thick darkness," "a day of wrath" in which the "face of the people shall be much pained." (see also Psalm 97:2; Jeremiah 4:13) This harmonizes with Jesus' prophecy of "great tribulation" associated with his second advent. "Seeing" and "hearing" are used in Mark 4:11,12 and Matthew 13:14, 15 to signify understanding. A blind man may "see the point" without physical sight.

Elsewhere Jesus' return is pictured as thief-like; "For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night. ... But, ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief..." (1 Thessalonians 5:2-6; 2 Peter 3:10; Revelation 16:15) Interestingly, this follows the passage from which some envision a scene of people flying up toward heaven in answer to a "shout." A thief would not announce himself with a trumpet or a shout. When statements result in a literal absurdity, we know they must be symbolic and must therefore treat the whole passage as written in symbols.

Israel is still looking for their Messiah. When he was among them, they failed to recognize him because they were blinded by their own ideas and forgot their prophet Isaiah's words: "He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief..."(Isaiah 53:3-12) Let us be sure to form **our** expectations from Scripture only.

Please send me the free booklet

### OUR LORD'S RETURN

Send your request to:  
Detroit Bible Students Ecclesia  
PO Box 51, Southfield, MI 48037-0051

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_