

The Second Coming Of Jesus

'Elisabeth called out with a loud voice and said, "Blessed above all women are you! And blessed is the Fruit of your womb! How am I so honoured that the mother of my Lord should come to me?" ... Mary stayed with Elisabeth for about three months then returned home' (Luke 1:42, 43 & 56).

'In that district there were shepherds living in the fields, watching over their flocks by night ... and an angel from God stood by them ... and said to them, "Behold, do not be afraid for I bring you good news of great joy which will come to all people; for to you is born this day in the town of David, a Saviour, Who is the Messiah." ... Suddenly there appeared with the angel an army of the troops of heaven praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest and peace on earth and good will among men" (Luke 2:8 to 14). 'There was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon. This man was righteous and devout, looking for the Consolation of Israel and the Holy Spirit was upon him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Messiah. Prompted by the Holy Spirit he came into the temple, and when Mary and Joseph brought in the little child Jesus to do for him according to the custom of the Law, Simeon took Jesus up in his arms and blessed God and said, "And now Lord, release Your servant to depart in peace according to Your Word, for with my own eyes I have seen Your Salvation which You ordained before all peoples; a Light for the nations and the glory of Your people Israel" ... And Anna too came up at that same hour and she gave thanks to God and spoke of Jesus to all who were looking for redemption in Jerusalem' (Luke 2:25 to 38).

'When Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod, behold, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem asking, "Where is He Who has been born King of the Jews? For we have seen His 'star' rising in the east and have come to worship Him ... When they saw the 'star', they were filled with ecstatic joy and going into the house they saw the Child with Mary His mother, and they fell down and worshipped Him. Then opening their bags they presented to Him gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh' (Matthew 2:1 & 2; 10 & 11). By the time these men saw Jesus, He was about two years old (Matthew 2:16).

When we study the fullness of these passages of scripture (only a small portion has been included here), we can see just a handful of people who were diligently looking for the Messiah, seemed to understand He was going to come as a baby from a humble family; only Joseph and Mary; Zachariah and Elisabeth; Simeon and Anna; a few Jewish shepherds and a few wise Jews from the east (Persia). When we add them up, there were less than twenty people who knew Jesus was the Messiah when He was born. That is not a lot of people. Later, Jesus' divinity was revealed to John the Baptist, the twelve disciples and a few others. Again there were less than twenty people who knew exactly Who Jesus was. It was only after Jesus died and rose again, was His divinity revealed to all who believed, and the number amounted to thousands, and over the years that number has grown to millions of people. So until Jesus rose from the dead, less than forty people realised their long-awaited Messiah had finally come.

The Jews were looking for a King; someone like Moses Who would deliver them from the oppression of the Romans (Luke 24:21). They believed the coming of the Messiah was imminent. The Jews knew the Messiah had to come before the second temple was destroyed (Daniel 9:26) and Jesus prophesied that the temple would be destroyed (Matthew 24:2). They knew He would come from the tribe of Judah and He would come into Jerusalem riding a colt (Genesis 49:10 & 11; Zechariah 9:9). That was fulfilled (John 12:15). Some believed He would come as a strong warrior Messiah, not as a helpless little infant Who grew to be a quiet, humble Man. The prophet Micah said the Anointed One would come from Bethlehem (Micah 5:2) and that was fulfilled (Matthew 2:5 & 6). It was prophesied Jesus would be called a Nazarene, a Branch of the divine lineage of kings (Isaiah 11:1) and that was fulfilled (Matthew 2:23). The prophet Hosea said Jesus would be called out of Egypt (Hosea 11:1) and that was fulfilled (Matthew 2:15). All of these schools of thought were scripturally and collectively correct but were singularly incomplete. The Jews argued about where the Messiah would come from (John 7:41 to 43). As a result of their confusion regarding the prophecies, they were not able to fully understand where, when and how the Messiah came, and many Jews, even devout Jews missed the first coming of Jesus because they were looking for the wrong thing. Jesus came to earth as prophesied, but they did not know Who He was. 'He came into the world, the world He made, yet the world did not know Him. He came to His own homeland, but His own people did not receive Him' (John 1:10 & 11). He lived and walked amongst the people, but looked so normally human, He was accepted as an ordinary human man. There was no obvious outward sign that Jesus was divine. There was nothing about Him that drew people to Him, and that was prophesied too. 'He has no form or royal comeliness that we should look at Him and no beauty that we should desire Him' (Isaiah 53:2). The crowds only followed Jesus around because He fed them, not because of the divine miracles they saw Him do (John 6:26). They thought

Jesus was just a Prophet (Matthew 21:46). The only people who knew exactly Who Jesus really was, were the people who were looking specifically for a baby or the ones to whom God revealed Jesus' divinity (Luke 10:22). From the time of His birth to His death, less than forty people knew He was the Son of God; the Anointed One; the Messiah. He was born as a baby in the normal way, grew up the normal way, worked with his earthly father Joseph, and died as any normal human would. Some Jews did not believe He had been raised from the dead (Matthew 27:62 to 66 then 28:11 to 15). The only difference in the minds of the people was His remarkable wisdom, His knowledge of the scriptures and the miracles He did (Matthew 13:54; Luke 2:47), otherwise it all seemed so ordinary.

Jesus did not come secretly, but He did come silently to His parents the first time. The Bible does not record anybody who witnessed His actual birth (Luke 2:6 & 7). The shepherds saw Jesus as a tiny infant but everyone else saw Him after He was eight days old. Jesus came with great angelic fanfare – and all but about twenty people missed the event. His birth was heralded by a gloriously shining army of angels (Luke 2:9 & 13). A supernatural 'star' rose over the east (Persia) to alert the wise Jewish men of Jesus' birth, then the same 'star' stood directly over the house where Jesus and His parents were staying (Matthew 2:2 & 10). These men were looking for the supernatural 'star' that would tell them the King of the Jews had been born. They were looking for the right thing: a baby. The 'star' was a supernatural event and cannot be explained in the natural world. Herod and the whole of Jerusalem knew about Jesus' birth and the knowledge of the event made them uneasy (Matthew 2:3). When Jesus grew up He was well known and respected in the whole of Israel (Luke 4:15) but because of their confusion and the mis-understanding of scripture and prophecies, they did not realise He was the Messiah. When Jesus had been preaching, healing the sick and feeding the people throughout the land, everyone knew about Him; almost every eye had seen Him. Some people had worshipped Him (John 9:38); some wanted to crown Him King (John 12:13), but most people still did not know Who He really was. Only the initial handful of about forty people knew He was the Messiah, until after He was raised from the dead.

Fast forward 2,000 or so years. There is confusion today about the same issues – how, where and when will He come. Somehow, in God's unique way, all will be fulfilled and revealed. Like most prophecies, people will only realise the prophecy has been fulfilled after the event. There was confusion about where Jesus would come from; Bethlehem, Egypt or Nazareth. If we bring together the three prophecies regarding Jesus' first coming, we will see that He was born in Bethlehem, moved to Egypt then moved from Egypt to Nazareth in Galilee, so all three prophecies were fulfilled. If the same situation were to occur today, there would be three scripturally correct but incomplete schools of thought. There would be the 'school of the Bethlehem believers'; the 'school of the Nazarene believers' and the 'school of the out of Egypt believers'. All would be correct, but incomplete. In reality, the three prophecies look as though they contradict each other, but they do not because all were fulfilled. It was not until after Jesus' resurrection, and the eyewitnesses were writing down the four Gospels (Luke 1:2; 2 Peter 1:16), did they record the fulfilment of the three prophecies, from where He would emerge. Jesus said they were witnesses to all the things He did (Luke 24:48).

We are in the same situation as the ancient Jews were. Just like the ancient Jews knew, everybody knows the Messiah is coming again soon and His arrival is imminent. We do not know exactly when this will happen, but we do know He is certainly on His way. Just like the ancient Jews, Christians today are looking for the Messiah to deliver them from the oppression of this world. Some believe they will be 'raptured' away while others do not believe in the 'rapture'. Some people believe they will be 'raptured' off at the start of the dreaded Great Tribulation, others believe they will be 'raptured' off half way through the tribulation and others believe they will endure through the whole of the tribulation and only then Jesus will gather His elect (Mark 13:27). Christians are looking for Someone who will rule over the whole earth for one thousand years (Revelation 20:6). The scriptures say every eye will see Him (Revelation 1:7); He will come suddenly like a 'thief in the night' (1 Thessalonians 5:2); He will come with a shout of the archangel and the blast of a trumpet (1 Thessalonians 4:16); He will come like a flash of lightning (Matthew 24:27); He will be coming in the clouds (Acts 1:11; Matthew 24:30). Some Christians believe they know exactly when the Lord is coming and others reject that thought (Matthew 25:13). We can see how all these various interpretations of the numerous prophecies cause confusion and discord amongst Christians the world over – and all believe they have the correct answer and everyone else is wrong. It is obvious that some of the schools of thought are collectively correct but singularly incomplete, because they are all written in the scriptures except one which is unfortunately, the most popular – the 'rapture' theory. That is not scriptural so it is incorrect, but the others are scripturally correct, although some are misunderstood. All prophecies will be fulfilled in God's way and in His time. We will look more closely at these various theories and what the scriptures tell us.

Many Christians believe Jesus will come secretly and snatch all Christians away, then return again later. Jesus will not be coming twice and He will not be coming secretly. The so-called 'rapture' has been confused with the First Resurrection. Jesus made it very clear that the first resurrection will happen on the last day of the Great Tribulation (John 6:39, 40, 44, 54; 11:24). We are warned grievous days will come before the last day (2 Timothy 3:1). When some Christians who have been erroneously taught that they will be 'raptured away' to escape the Great Tribulation, finally realise they will have to actually endure right to the end, they will fall away from the faith, and only those who endure to the end will be saved (Matthew 24:9 to 13). Jesus said, "In those days, after the tribulation ... then they will see the Son of Man coming in the clouds with great power and glory. Then He will send out His angels and gather His chosen people from the ends of the earth" (Mark 13:24 to 27). So it is very clear that God's people will not be caught up in the first resurrection until after the Great Tribulation. Tribulation merely means pressure. Christians will suffer a time of great testing and pressure. Jesus made it clear, in order to be saved, Christians will have to endure that pressure right to the very end (Matthew 10:22; Mark 13:13). That is something we all need to keep in mind.

Just like nearly all the Jews apart from about forty, missed Jesus' first coming, so will most people miss His second coming. Just like most religious people did not realise the Messiah had come and lived amongst them until after He had gone, so most Christians will not realise Jesus has come, been amongst us and left with His Bride. It will be then, they will realise they have missed His return. That is when the Christians will scream out, "Lord, Lord", and there will be wailing and gnashing of teeth because they will have missed Him (Matthew 7:21). Just as most Jews missed Him the first time because they were looking for the wrong thing and so were not prepared, so also many modern Christians will miss out because they are looking for the wrong things, or because their level of Christian behaviour is below what God requires, so they will not be prepared. Remember that the Bible says His Bride will make herself ready (Revelation 19:7). To find out how to be ready, study Matthew chapters 24 & 25.

How will Jesus come? The scriptures tell us Jesus will come silently, suddenly and in a cloud. How Jesus will return has been revealed to us, but not when. He will come in a cloud; a fluffy white cloud in the sky that is very normal for us. 'He was caught up and a cloud carried Him away out of their sight ... Two men (angels) said, "This same Jesus, Who was caught away into heaven, will return in exactly the same way in which you saw Him go into heaven"' (Acts 1:9 & 11). His ascent was witnessed by His disciples, but it was not accompanied with trumpets, thunder, lightning or a whirlwind – just a cloud ... but if we read carefully, the cloud was not quite normal. A cloud (one single cloud) caught Him up and carried Him away. Clouds do not normally do that. It would have been a supernatural event. The two angels said Jesus would return in exactly the same way as He left, and since He left quietly in a cloud, that leads us to believe He will return quietly in a cloud. The scriptures say He will come suddenly, silently and unexpectedly like a thief in the night, in clouds. 'They will see the Son of Man come in the clouds with great power and glory' (Mark 13:26). Power and glory are not noisy, although power is active. The blast of the trumpet and the shout of the archangel will be in heaven, but that does not mean we will hear it from earth. For example, whenever a sinner repents and turns to Jesus, there is great rejoicing in heaven (Luke 15:7 & 10) but we never hear it on earth. Jesus said just as lightning flashes from the east and is seen as far as the west, so will His coming be (Matthew 24:27). That does not mean He will come accompanied by lightning. It means that He will come as quickly and as suddenly as a flash of lightning, and just as sure as we can see lightning, so we can be sure we will see Him. Further to this, lightning is silent apart from a cracking sound. It is thunder that is noisy, and thunder is not mentioned in this verse. A disturbing fact is; even though Jesus Himself said He was coming as suddenly as a thief in the night, people are still expecting Him to come with a great announcement. When Jesus said He would come like a thief, that also means silently. When a thief comes to break in and steal, he never calls out, "Hello, it's only me, your friendly neighbourhood robber. I've come to rob you. Don't worry, I'll soon be gone – with all your goods!" Absolutely not. He plans his actions, comes suddenly and silently, then leaves quickly. That is how Jesus described His return – as quick as a flash.

Where will Jesus come? Jesus loves Jerusalem more than any place on earth (Luke 13:34 & 35). He calls Jerusalem His beloved city (Revelation 20:9). He lamented over it and strongly implied Jerusalem would be the place He would return to, when He said, "You will not see Me again until you say, 'Blessed is He Who comes in the name of the Lord.'" By these verses, we can see how and where Jesus will return, but not when. There are several things we must do to prepare ourselves for His sudden return.

When will Jesus return? Jesus said we will not be told when He is going to return, but we must be ready for Him (Matthew 25:13). If anyone believes they have all the answers to when Jesus will arrive, then they are deluding themselves and the truth is not in them. No one knows exactly when Jesus will come. 'Be ready, for the Son of Man (Jesus) is coming at an hour when you do not expect Him' (Luke 12:40). When Jesus was

walking around on earth, even He did not know when His return was to be. 'No one knows of that day and hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son but only the Father ... watch therefore, for you do not know what day your Lord is coming' (Matthew 24:36 & 42). The disciples asked Jesus, "Lord, is this the time when You will re-establish Your Kingdom and restore Israel?" Jesus said to them, "It is not for you to know what time brings which the Father has appointed by His authority" (Acts 1:6 & 7). 'Watch, for you do not know when the Lord is coming, whether in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows (meaning pre-dawn), or in the morning. Watch, lest coming suddenly He might find you sleeping (complacent). What I tell you, I tell all: Watch' (Mark 13:35 to 37). By these verses, we can establish that Jesus is keeping the time of His return from us. What we must do is read the 'signs' Jesus gave us to look for in Matthew chapter 24 and Mark chapter 13. Another hint Jesus gave is this: "This Gospel of the Kingdom will be preached in the whole world for a testimony to all the nations, and then the end will come" (Matthew 24:14). Until the Kingdom Gospel is preached all over the world, He will not come. It is clear we will not know exactly when Jesus is coming – we just know it is soon. Two thousand years ago the Jews knew the Messiah was coming – they just did not know when and all but about forty people missed knowing Him as the Messiah. Everyone else thought He was just a Prophet. Only the few who were ready for His coming, saw Him as the Messiah. It is not our mandate to discover exactly when Jesus will return – our mandate is to encourage people to be ready for the event.

A word of warning. We must be careful. Jesus warned us not to follow false messiahs. 'Many false prophets will rise up and deceive many and lead many into error ... If anyone says to you, "Here is the Messiah. There He is!" Do not believe it; for false messiahs and false prophets will arise and they will show great signs and wonders so as to deceive and lead others astray – even God's elect. See, I (Jesus) have warned you beforehand' (Matthew 24:11, 23 to 25). If there are people who claim to know when Jesus is coming – do not believe them for they are false prophets. Jesus has warned us.

Precisely when Jesus will return is not exactly clear, but we can be sure of one thing; Jesus' second coming will not happen the way people think it will. All we know is, it will be incredibly fast and it will be in Jerusalem. His return will be so quick, most people will be caught unawares. That is why we have to be perpetually ready. God's power is limitless and He is going to work everything out in His way, in His time and where He desires. If we are looking in the wrong direction then we are in danger of missing out. We must keep our eyes firmly fixed on Him, and not on various and erroneous speculations. Just as the first coming of Jesus did not happen the way many thought it would, so Jesus' second coming will not happen the way people think it will.

Amen and God bless you.

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