

Why Christ Must Return

According to a group of respected biblical scholars, Jesus Christ never promised He would return to this earth. The Second Coming, they claim, is a myth—a promise put on the lips of Jesus by His followers. But if Jesus Christ does not return, our world is *doomed*—there remains no hope!

Our world is desperately sick. In spite of super-technology and the explosion of scientific knowledge created by more efficient computerization, the space program, and the advancements in medical science, our world is *not* getting better! In recent years, we have heard much of arms reduction, Soviet *glasnost*, plans to clean up the environment, promises to rebuild the economy. We are reminded *daily* of the murderers, rapists, child molesters, arsonists, and drug traffickers that plague our cities and stalk our streets; of the growing threat of violent street gangs, now out of control; of mounting economic woes; and of intense tension in the Middle East and other parts of the world.

We have polluted many of our waterways and estuaries. Hazardous chemical wastes and deadly radioactive pollution continue to be a problem, in spite of government sponsored efforts to clean up old dump sites and improve existing storage facilities. Air pollution, in spite of government regulations, remains a curse to many heavily populated areas.

Now, we face the most devastating form of pollution of all—*mind pollution!* Millions of American youths, many in their preteen years, are drinking in of the filth available to anyone owning a television set and video tape player. Pornographic materials, portraying just about every form of lewd, sexual perversity imaginable reaches millions of young developing minds. This information molds wrong attitudes about sex, marriage, and the male-female relationship. It has also contributed to the development of sexual deviant behavior and resultant sex crimes.

Indeed, our world is sick! And one thing is evident: *Our problems are not going away!*

There remains only one hope for planet earth: *The Second Coming of Jesus Christ!* If we are to ever have peace, if we are to find real solutions to the problems that threaten the very fabric of our society, then Jesus Christ *must* return!

But according to a group of more than two-dozen scholars who met in 1989 for a three-day “Jesus Seminar,” Jesus Christ never said He would return! Incredibly, this group—and their approach to Scripture—is representative of a vast body of “theologians” whose influence has been felt throughout the world of biblical scholarship.

Scholars Reject Second Coming

In spite of the *many* promises of a Second Coming and establishment of the Kingdom of God on earth, some twenty-eight out of thirty well-respected biblical scholars said that such promises were never made, that the language Jesus used in speaking of the Kingdom of God was “mystical,” and that the gospel writers and later disciples of Christianity misinterpreted and misrepresented Jesus’ statements—thus giving birth to the idea of a *future* Kingdom age.

Believe it or not, the seemingly offbeat opinion expressed by these scholars is far more widespread than most evangelical Christians imagine. According to Edward Beutner, campus minister at Santa Clara University and seminar participant, the opinion expressed in the seminar is quietly taught in *most* major seminaries and universities.

Speaking of his colleagues and fellow seminarians, Beutner stated, “These are not maverick scholars. They take a very careful approach to how sayings of Jesus were transmitted and to the evolution of the Bible texts.”

Oh? Careful approach? Let’s open our Bibles and see just how “careful” these learned academicians really are in the evaluation of God’s revealed Word!

To dismiss Christ’s promises of a Second Coming, one must either: 1) reject portions of the Bible as divinely-inspired revelation, or 2) “spiritualize” the many scriptures that speak of the Second Coming of Christ and establishment of the Kingdom of God on earth.

Many scholars, especially those of the *postmillennial* and *amillennial* schools of thought, believe that the Kingdom of God was established in the earth at the Ascension, or on the Day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit came as a “rushing, mighty wind.” They believe that such expressions as “coming in the clouds of heaven” refer to the Ascension, or to the “judgment” that befell Jerusalem (said to be “apostate Israel,” or the “great whore” of Revelation 17) in A.D. 70.

Some believe that the Second Coming will occur on the “last day” of human history, *after* the “Kingdom” has prevailed in the political affairs of this world. Others believe that the Second Coming is “spiritual,” that we need not expect a literal, visible return of Christ. And still others believe that Christ’s followers put promises of a Second Coming on the lips of the Savior—that Jesus Himself never actually said He would return. The latter group apparently believes that Christians of later centuries misinterpreted the writings of the first-century disciples, who themselves misinterpreted (or misrepresented) Jesus’ teachings about His coming and the advent of a new age.

According to an Associated Press report, the “Jesus Seminar” group “voted overwhelmingly that the language used to describe the future Kingdom of God in the New Testament is mythic and symbolic, and recommended that people should not believe in or look forward to the Second Coming and new age.”

But let’s not be too hasty in accepting the theories of men, regardless their academic prestige or “scholarly” status. Instead, let’s open our Bibles and *prove* whether Jesus promised He would return and establish His Kingdom.

Just what did Jesus say about His coming? What did the apostles believe? What did they teach? And what does the Bible say about the future of our planet?

Christian Hope Centers on Second Coming

How incredible that a group of “expert” theologians who have spent *thousands* of hours in the study of God’s Word could claim that Christ never promised a Second Coming, especially in view of the fact that all four Gospels and the book of Acts confirm that Jesus promised He would return, and *every* New Testament writer speaks of His coming.

The New Testament teaching on the Second Coming is not shrouded in some mysterious language veiled in symbols and metaphors. Like so many other biblical truths, it is simple, clear, easy to understand.

Christ spoke often of His coming and of the end of the age. It was His teaching that prompted the disciples to ask, “Tell us, when shall these things be? And what shall be the sign of *thy coming*, and of the *end of the world*?” (Matthew 24:3).

Christ’s reply was clear. He didn’t say His coming would be “spiritual.” Nor did He speak of it with symbolic terms, or in esoteric language. He stated plainly, “For as the lightning cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be” (verse 27).

He continued: “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...

“But as the days of Noah were, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be. For as in the days that were before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered into the ark, And knew not until the flood came, and took them all away; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be...

“Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come. But know this, that if the Goodman of the house had known in what watch the thief would come, he would have watched, and would not have suffered his house to be broken up. Therefore be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh” (verses 30, 37-39,42-44).

Some claim that expressions such as “coming in the clouds of heaven” are not to be understood as a literal, visible coming, but refer to Christ’s “spiritual presence.” Only “spiritual eyes” can “see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven...”

It is true that Jesus employed allegory and hyperbole from time to time, and that He frequently spoke in parables—but the events leading up to His coming and the end of the age are not described in parabolic or allegorical style.

Nobody would suggest that the wars, famines, pestilences, earthquakes, and false prophets are allegorical in nature. Why, then, should anyone assume that His statements about “coming in the clouds of heaven” should be spiritualized away, and mean something other than the obvious?

Christ’s description of events leading up to His coming is followed by a series of parables, each of them portraying a *literal* coming.

The first concerns a “lord” and his servants. The wise servant provides “meat in due season” in his lord’s household, even while his lord is away, Jesus says, “Blessed is that servant, whom his lord *when he cometh* shall find so doing” (Matthew 24:46).

But the evil servant, seeing that his lord “delayeth his coming,” begins to smite his fellowservants. Of him, Jesus says, “The lord of that servant *shall come in a day when he looketh not for him*, and in an hour that he is not aware of, And shall cut him asunder, and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth” (verses 50,51).

Are we to suppose that the coming of this “lord” to his household represents the spiritual, invisible “presence” of Jesus Christ, and not a literal, visible Second Coming? The “Spiritual presence” idea is especially absurd in view of the promise confirmed by two angels as the apostles watched Christ ascend to heaven. The angels 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 1:11).

The Ascension was actual, visible; it was not some “spiritual” occurrence. The apostles *saw* Christ rise into the earth’s atmosphere. The angels clearly said that His coming would be *like* His ascension.

The next parable, recorded in Matthew 25:1-12, is the parable of the ten virgins. Five foolish and five wise virgins awaited the arrival of the bridegroom. The bridegroom represents Christ; the ten virgins represent the church. When the midnight arrival of the bridegroom was announced, the five foolish virgins, having no oil for their lamps, were not prepared to go out and meet him. The point of the parable is in verse 13: “Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh.”

It would be extremely difficult to read a “spiritual presence” type of “coming” into this parable.

Next, we come to the parable of the talents (verse 14-30). In this parable, a man (representing Christ) planning to travel into a “far country” (representing heaven), gave each of his servants a certain number of talents, expecting them to make profitable investments during his absence.

“And after a long time the lord of those servants cometh, and reckoneth with them” (verse 19). The servants who had used their talents profitably were each told, “Well done, good and faithful servant: thou has been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord” (verse 21,23).

The “unprofitable servant,” having failed to use the talent his lord had given him, was cast into “outer darkness.”

This parable, as the previous two, leaves no room for anything other than a literal Second Coming.

The same is true of the last of this series of parables. Notice how Christ opens the parable:

“When the Son of man shall come in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, *then* shall He sit upon the throne of His glory” (verse 31). Please read the entire parable in your Bible—verse 31 to the end of the chapter.

Proponents of *postmillennialism* and *amillennialism* try to either spiritualize this parable away or claim it pertains to a time after the church succeeds in “Christianizing” the world.

Such ideas do not agree with the context, which is set forth in the three previous parables and in Christ’s non-allegorical descriptions (chapter 24) of the end-time and Second Coming.

Anyone claiming that Christ never promised He would return and establish the Kingdom of God on earth either must distort the plain teaching of the Olivet prophecy or cut both chapters (24 and 25) out of Matthew’s Gospel.

The book of Matthew wouldn’t be the only account in need of pruning. The editor’s knife would also have to be used on Mark’s Gospel. The following verses would have to be cut out:

“Whosoever therefore shall be ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation; of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed, *when He cometh* in the glory of His Father and the holy angels” (Mark 8:38).

“And then shall they see the Son of man *coming in the clouds* with power and glory” (Mark 13:26).

“Watch ye therefore: for ye know not when the master of the house *cometh* at even, or at midnight, or at the cockcrowing, or in the morning: Lest *coming* suddenly he find you sleeping. And what I say unto you I say unto all, Watch” (Mark 13:35-37).

Luke, too, would have to give up several verses. For example:

“Blessed are those servants, whom the lord *when he cometh* shall find watching...” (Luke 12:37).

“But and if that servant say in his heart, My lord delayeth his coming; and shall begin to beat the menservants and maidens... The lord of that servant will come in a day when he looketh not for him...” (verses 45-46).

“And then shall they see the Son of man *coming in a cloud* with power and great glory” (Luke 21:27).

The parable of the pounds (Luke 19:12-27) would certainly have to be clipped from Luke. This accounts pictures Christ going to a “far country” (heaven) to receive for Himself a Kingdom, and, after receiving the Kingdom, *returning* to reward His servants.

John’s Gospel would also require a little surgery. John quotes Jesus as saying, “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 14:3). Shortly before the Ascension, John writes that Jesus said to Peter, “If I will that he [John] tarry *till I come*, what is that to thee?” (John 21:22,23).

A quick review of the above scriptures will show that *all four Gospels* confirm in the clearest of language that Jesus promised He would return to this earth and establish the Kingdom of God. That promise is reiterated in the first chapter of the book of Acts, and, as we shall see, is confirmed throughout the New Testament.

The apostle Peter who had three times denied Christ in the night of His betrayal, later boldly proclaimed Christ’s gospel to the Jews.

“Repent ye therefore,” the apostle urged, “and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord; And *He shall send Jesus Christ*, which before was preached unto you: Whom the heaven must receive *until* the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began” (Acts 3:19-21).

Here was a man who had actually seen Christ ascending to heaven. He could only have had a Second Coming in mind when he said that the heavens must receive Christ “*until* the times of restitution of all things.”

We find Peter, years later, still holding to the hope of the Second Coming. In his first epistle he wrote of the future “appearing of Jesus Christ” (I Peter 1:7); of “the grace that is to be brought unto you at the *revelation* of Jesus Christ” (verse 13); and of the time “when His glory shall be revealed” (I Peter 4:13). He said, “When the chief Shepherd shall *appear*, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away” (I Peter 5:4).

Remember, Peter had spent three and one-half years at Christ’s feet, receiving His teachings. He had stood watching, in utter amazement, as the ascending Lord disappeared in the clouds of heaven. He had heard the angelic proclamation: “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.” Are we to assume that Peter had no clear understanding of his Master’s promises?

John, who sat alongside Peter at the feet of Jesus, also wrote of the Second Coming: “And now little children, abide in Him; that, *when He shall appear*, we may have

confidence, and not be ashamed before Him *at His coming*” (I John 2:28); and, “But we know that, when He shall appear, we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is” (I John 3:2).

Many years after the Ascension, James, the Lord’s half-brother wrote, “Be patient therefore, brethren, *unto the coming of the Lord*. Behold, the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and latter rain. Be ye also patient, stablish your hearts: for the *coming of the Lord draweth nigh*” (James 5:7,8).

Jude, probably another of Jesus’ half-brothers, also believed in the Second Coming. He wrote, “And Enoch also, the seventh from Adam, prophesied of these, saying, Behold, *the Lord cometh* with ten thousand of His Saints, To execute judgment upon all...” (Jude 14,15).

In the book of Revelation we read, “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” (Revelation 1:7).

Christ says, “Behold, I come as a thief [meaning that He will come *unexpectedly*, not invisibly]. Blessed is he that watcheth, and keepeth his garments, lest he walk naked, and they see his shame” (Revelation 16:15).

A few chapters, later the promise is reiterated: “Behold, I come quickly: blessed is he that keepeth the sayings of the prophecy of this book...And, behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be...He that testifieth these things saith, Surely I come quickly. Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus” (Revelation 22:7,12,20).

We see Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, James, Peter, and Jude—writers of the four Gospels, the book of Acts, the General Epistles, and book of Revelation—are *in complete agreement*. They all believed and taught that Jesus Christ would return and set up His Kingdom on earth!

But what of the apostle Paul, who write the greater portion of the New Testament? Did he believe in the Second Coming?

Early in his first epistle to the Corinthians, Paul refers to “the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ” (I Corinthians 1:7). Later, he exhorts, “Therefore judge nothing before the time, *until the Lord come*, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the heart: and then shall every man have praise of God” (I Corinthians 4:5).

In his instructions of the Lord’s Supper, Paul explains, “For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord’s death, *till He come*” (I Corinthians 11:26). And in the well known “resurrection chapter,” he says that every man will be raised from the dead “in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ’s *at His coming*” (I Corinthians 15:23).

To the Thessalonians he writes, “for what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ *at his coming*?” (I Thessalonians 2:9). He further states, “And the Lord make you to increase and abound in love one toward another...To the end He may establish your hearts unblamable in holiness before God, even our Father, *at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ* with all His saints” (I Thessalonians 3:12,13).

In chapter 5 he says, “And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless *unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ*” (verse 23).

In his second epistle to the Thessalonians, Paul writes, “Now we beseech you, brethren, by *the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ*, and our gathering together unto Him, That ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled...”(II Thessalonians 2:1,2). He then explains that before the Lord comes, the “man of sin” must be revealed. “And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of His mouth, and shall destroy with *the brightness of His coming*” (verse 8).

The writer of the book of Hebrews, whether Paul or someone else, speaks of the “world to come” (Hebrews 2:5), and states, “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” (Hebrews 9:28). In chapter 13 he writes, “For here [in the present world] have we no continuing city, but *we seek one to come*” (verse 14).

Could anything be clearer than the New Testament teaching on the Second Coming of Jesus Christ? *Every writer of the New Testament positively declares that Jesus Christ will return!* If we reject the many clear scriptures on the Second Coming, how can we accept anything the Bible says? What is the basis of our faith? How can we accept the Bible as the inspired infallible Word of God?

Shall we “pick and choose” what we shall believe? Or shall we *accept and believe* what the Bible plainly says?

Apparently, one reason the “Jesus Seminar” scholars reject the biblical teaching of the Second Coming of Christ and establishment of the world-ruling Kingdom of God on earth is they think the Kingdom of which Jesus spoke was a present reality in His time, not something coming in the future.

As Bernard Brandon Scott of Phillips Graduate Seminary in Tulsa, Oklahoma reportedly said, “You can’t have Jesus saying both the kingdom is here and is off in the future.”

If indeed the New Testament texts we possess have Christ making contradictory statements about the nature of the Kingdom of God and the time of its establishment, then perhaps the scholars are partially justified in their conclusion.

But is there a conflict in the “Kingdom” passages of the New Testament? Did Jesus speak of His Kingdom as something present in His time? He said, “I will build my church...” (Matthew 16:18), and He did! We find *hundreds* of references to His church and a brief sketch of its origin and early history in the New Testament. But is the *church* the same as the *Kingdom*?

Let’s see what the Bible really says!

Kingdom Not Yet Established on Earth!

Jesus Christ came preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God. “Now after that John was put into prison, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the Kingdom of God, And saying, The time is fulfilled, and the Kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel” (Mark 1:15).

Just what did He mean when He said “the Kingdom of God is at hand”? Did He mean that He was about to establish His Kingdom, and that repentant believers could enter the Kingdom right then and there?

Did He mean that He was about to establish His *church* (Greek: *Ekklesia*, meaning, “out-called,” or “assembly”), and that the church would be His Kingdom?

If we say that a certain event is “at hand,” we mean that the event is about to occur. This simple logic has led many prominent church leaders to believe the Kingdom of God is *already* on the earth, and has been here since the time of Jesus.

Well-known television evangelist Pat Robertson uses a similar line of reasoning in his best-selling book, *The Secret Kingdom*. Robertson says that the Kingdom of God is here, *now*, and that all Christians should work toward bringing the “secret Kingdom” into the visible world by putting the principles of the Kingdom to use.

Others, particularly advocates of “Dominion Theology,” a growing movement led by Christian activists who believe that “the Kingdom” will prevail over the forces of evil *before* the return of Christ, agree with Robertson, but reject his belief in the *premillennial* Second Coming.

Before the sun finally did set on the British Empire, many Anglo-Israelites believed Great Britain to be the Kingdom of God. Today, after a few adjustments in the Anglo-Israel Kingdom theory, the United States is said to be the “restored Israel” of prophecy, and is therefore the Kingdom of God.

But do such ideas agree with the Bible? Do the biblical texts as handed down to us say the Kingdom is present *and* off in the future?

Listen to the words of James: “Hearken, my beloved brethren, Hath not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, and *heirs of the Kingdom* which He hath promised to them that love Him?” (James 2:5).

Notice: The “poor of *this world* rich in faith: are “HEIRS of the Kingdom”! The chosen of God, who live in this present world, are *heirs* of the Kingdom of God! Heirs are not yet *inheritors*! They shall inherit—but for now, they are *heirs*.

The Kingdom of God, then, is something that can be *inherited*. And the saints—those “rich in faith,” the chosen of God who live (or have lived) in this world—shall, *in the future*, inherit the Kingdom!

Now, with this in mind notice one other vital point of truth: The apostle Paul wrote, “Now this I say, brethren, that *flesh and blood CANNOT inherit the Kingdom of God...*” (I Corinthians 15:50). In verses 35 through 49, Paul explains that the saints will be given new, *spiritual* bodies at the resurrection (which occurs at the Second Coming—verse 23). No longer will they be mortal, flesh and blood human beings; they will then be incorruptible *spirit beings*, having “*put on immortality*” (verse 53).

Are not all human beings, including Christians, *flesh and blood*? Are not the scholars of the “Jesus Seminar” flesh and blood? What about the citizens of the United States, Canada, Britain? Yes, all are mortal, flesh and blood human beings! Therefore, the Kingdom is *not* theirs, for “flesh and blood *cannot* inherit the Kingdom of God”!

Note also Romans the eighth chapter: “The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: And if children, then *heirs*; heirs of God, and *joint-heirs* with Christ; if so be that we suffer with Him, that we may be [in the future] also glorified together” (verses 16,17).

The church, then, cannot be the Kingdom. The church, made up of flesh and blood human beings, is that spiritual organism whose members are *heirs* of God and *joint-heirs* with Jesus Christ. They shall, at some point in the future, *inherit* what Jesus Christ inherited: eternal life in God’s everlasting Kingdom!

Paul continues: “For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which *shall be* revealed in us. For the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God” (verses 18,19). And when shall that glory be revealed in the saints?

Turn again to I Corinthians 15, and notice verses 21 through 23: “For since by man came death, by man came also the *resurrection* of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ’s *at His coming*.”

Later, in the same chapter, Paul says, “Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep [in death], but we shall all be changed, In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead [in Christ] shall be raised incorruptible, and we [the living saints] shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality” (verses 51-53).

This passage appears immediately after Paul’s statement, “flesh and blood *cannot* inherit the Kingdom of God” (verse 50).

Could anything be clearer? The saints, as heirs of the Kingdom, will inherit the Kingdom at the Second Coming of Christ—not before!

Paul is consistent in his teaching. To the Thessalonians he writes, “For this we say unto you by the Word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the *coming of the Lord* shall not prevent [precede] them which are asleep [in death]. For *the Lord Himself shall descent from heaven* with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God [the “last trump” mentioned in I Corinthians 15]; 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” (I Thessalonians 4:15-17).

Clearly, Paul believed in and taught the Second Coming of Christ and establishment of the Kingdom of God on earth. He knew that the saints, as heirs of the Kingdom, would not inherit the Kingdom until the coming Christ.

And there is more proof. Notice II Timothy 4:1.

“I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead *at His appearing and His Kingdom*.”

Paul goes on to say, “For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand” (verse 6).

Did Paul expect to “go to heaven” at the time of his “departure” (death), as many claim? If so, then perhaps we could argue that Paul, in heaven—in the presence of God the Father and Jesus Christ—would be in the Kingdom.

But Paul’s use of the word “departure” hardly suggests that he expected to “go to heaven” upon death. Notice verses 7 and 8:

“I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me *at that day*: and not to me only, but unto all them that love *His appearing*.” This is an obvious reference to the Second Coming!

Also, verse 18 is significant: Paul writes, “And the Lord shall deliver me from every evil work, and will preserve me *unto His heavenly Kingdom*...”

Paul looked *forward* to the Kingdom of God, expecting to receive a crown of righteousness at the *Second Coming*—“at *His appearing and His Kingdom*”!

Further Proof

Now, let's briefly look at several scriptures that further prove that the Kingdom of God is the *future* inheritance of the saints, not a Kingdom that is presently in place on the earth.

In Matthew the sixth chapter, Jesus instructs His disciples to pray, "Thy Kingdom come..." (verse 10). Why would He instruct them to pray "Thy Kingdom come" if the Kingdom had already come (or was being established on earth then)?

In chapter 25, Jesus says, "When the Son of man shall come in His glory [referring to the *Second Coming*], and all the holy angels with Him, *then* [after He comes] shall He sit upon the throne of His glory." He will judge the nations, and will separate the righteous from the unrighteous. "Then shall the King say unto them on His right hand [the righteous], Come, ye blessed of my Father, *inherit the Kingdom* prepared for you from the foundation of the world" (verses 31-34). Notice, the Kingdom—though "*prepared from the foundation of the world*"—will not be established in the earth, and will not be inherited by the righteous, until *after* Jesus Christ returns.

At the Last Supper, Jesus said, "But I say unto you, I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's Kingdom" (Matthew 26:39). This was the *last time* Jesus, in His earthly life, would drink of the fruit of the vine with His disciples. But in the Kingdom of God, Jesus and His disciples will again sit together and partake of the fruit of the vine. Obviously, the Kingdom is yet future.

Jesus said, "And I appoint unto you a Kingdom, as my Father hath appointed unto me; *That ye may eat and drink at my table in my Kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel*" (Luke 22:29,30). Did the apostles, in their lifetimes, sit on thrones judging the tribes of Israel? Far from it! They were persecuted, martyred. Obviously, they will sit on their thrones *in the future*.

Then, many "from the east, and from the west, and from the north, and from the south" will sit down with Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and all the prophets in the Kingdom of God" (Luke 13:28,29). Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and the prophets cannot sit with Christ and His followers in the Kingdom until they are *resurrected* from the state of death! Remember, the resurrection will not occur until Jesus Christ descends from heaven (I Corinthians 15:23,51-56; I Thessalonians 4:13-17).

Paul and Barnabas exhorted the disciples of Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch "to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the Kingdom of God" (Acts 14:22). Such an exhortation would have never been made had the Kingdom of God already been set up.

The book of Revelation confirms the disciples' belief in a future Kingdom age. Notice what happens when the last of the seven "trumpet" plagues goes forth into the earth:

"And the seventh angel sounded; and there were great voices in heaven, saying, The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of His Christ; and *He shall reign for ever and ever*...And the nations were angry, and thy wrath is come, and the *time of the dead*, that they should be judged, and that thou shouldst *give reward unto thy servants the prophets, and to the saints, and them that fear thy name*, small and great; and shouldst destroy them which destroy the earth" (Revelation 11:15,18).

The events portrayed in the seventh trumpet include the return of Christ, the resurrection of the saints, and the beginning of Christ's Kingdom reign. Remember, the seventh trump is the *last trump* of the *seventh seal*, which pictures the great and terrible *Day of the Lord!* The Day of the Lord is preceded by the Great Tribulation (fifth seal) and heavenly signs (sixth seal).

In chapter 20, we find the same order. "And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them: and I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the Word of God, and which had not worshipped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands; and they *lived* [were resurrected] and reigned with Christ a *thousand years*" (verse 4).

In Luke 17, Jesus gave His disciples a parable to correct their misconception about the time the Kingdom of God was to be established.

Notice verse 11: "And as they heard these things, He added and spake a parable, because He was nigh to Jerusalem, and because they [the disciples] thought that the Kingdom of God should immediately appear."

Notice carefully: One purpose of this parable was to show that the Kingdom of God was *not* to appear immediately. The disciples had misunderstood. They knew that Jesus was the Messiah, that He was to set up His Kingdom—but they, as many today, had some misconceptions about the nature of the Kingdom and the time of its establishment.

Continue, verse 12: "He said therefore, A certain nobleman went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom, and to return."

The "nobleman" symbolizes Jesus Christ; the "far country" is heaven. After His resurrection, Jesus ascended to His Father in heaven *to receive for Himself a Kingdom!*

Many assume that the Kingdom has already been established—that Jesus, on His Father's throne in heaven, is now ruling in His Kingdom, which they believe is the church.

This is an erroneous assumption as the parable clearly shows.

Continue: "And he [the nobleman, symbolizing Christ] called his ten servants, and delivered them ten pounds, and said to them, *Occupy till I come*" (verse 13).

The ten servants, symbolizing those "called out," or chosen of God, were to make profitable investments with the money the nobleman had given them. This symbolized the saints' responsibility to grow in grace and knowledge, to build character, to do the work of God—thus putting to good use the spiritual resources Christ has given them.

The "citizens" in verse 14 represent the Jews of Jesus' day who rejected Him, refusing to have Him reign over them. As John tells us, "He came to His own, but His own received Him not" (John 1:11).

Verse 15 is especially important: "And it came to pass, that *when he was returned, having received the Kingdom*, then he commanded these servants to be called unto him, to whom he had given the money, that he might know how much every man had gained by trading."

The remainder of the parable shows that the nobleman rewarded his servants according to how much each had gained by trading. The servant whose pound gained ten pounds was given authority over ten cities. The one whose pound gained five pounds was given authority over five cities. The one who failed to put his pound to use received no authority.

Do you see the *clear* meaning of the parable? Jesus Christ went to His Father in heaven to receive for Himself a Kingdom. When He returns, *having received the Kingdom*, He will, at that time, *reward* His servants according to what they had done with the resources He had given them. Those found to have gained the more will be given greater responsibilities in the Kingdom. Those found to have gained less will be given lesser responsibilities.

Christ says, “And he that overcometh, and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give every man according as his work shall be” (Revelation 22:12).

Yes, Jesus Christ is coming to establish His Kingdom on earth. He will give His servants *power* over the nations! That power, or responsibility, will be granted to each servant according to his *works*!

But many reject this clear teaching of Scripture. Many theologians believe and teach that Christ’s promises of rulership to the saints who overcome merely mean that the *church* (which they believe is the Kingdom) will ultimately, over a very long period (perhaps thousands of years), dominate in this world’s affairs. In other words, the world, through the efforts of the church, will become predominantly Christian.

But think! All the promises of rulership were given not only to end-time saints, but to saints living in the first century as well. Is it believable that Christ would have given the persecuted saints of the first century promises of rulership, only to have them suffer and die without any hope of ever receiving those promises?

Of course not! The saints who overcame, who kept Christ’s words to the end, will most assuredly receive His promises of rulership! They will reign with Him *in His Kingdom*!

To the church in Laodicea, for example, Christ promised, “To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in His throne” (Revelation 3:21). Will the Laodicean saints who overcame sit with Christ in His throne? Will they reign with Him in His Kingdom? Or is this promise only for some generation of Christians yet to be born?

Paul wrote to the Corinthians: “Do ye not know that the saints shall judge the world? And if the world shall be judged by *you*, are ye worthy to judge the smallest matters?” (I Corinthians 6:2). Did he mean that a future generation of saints would dominate world politics, and thus “judge the world”? Or did he mean that the then living saints of Corinth would, in the future—in the Kingdom of God—judge the world?

The answers to these questions should be clearly obvious to anyone. The saints of the first century, and the saints of *all* centuries, will rule and reign with Christ in His Kingdom. To conclude otherwise is to *twist* the clear teaching of the Scriptures.

God’s Word is clear. Jesus and the apostles believed and taught that the Kingdom of God would be established on earth *in the future*.

But what about the passages that seem to say that the Kingdom is operative in the present age? Do the Scriptures, as handed down to us, say both the Kingdom is present *and* is off in the future, as the “Jesus Seminar” scholars contend?

Let’s now turn our attention to those scriptures that seem to put the Kingdom in the present.

The Present Kingdom

As noted earlier, Jesus came preaching the gospel of the Kingdom, saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the Kingdom of God is at hand.”

Jesus spoke these words almost 2,000 years ago; but, as we have seen, the Kingdom of God has yet to be established in the earth. Just what did He mean when He said that the Kingdom was *at hand*?

Consider the following: Jesus Christ is King of the Kingdom. He is the “Way” into the Kingdom and the “Door” by which we may enter. He came to call sinners to repentance—to show them how they could enter the Kingdom. When He said, “The Kingdom of God is at hand,” He meant the Messiah, the Savior—the only means under which men could enter the Kingdom of God—had come into the world of men and was in their midst.

This clarifies Jesus’ often misunderstood statement to the Pharisees: “The Kingdom of God cometh not with observation: Neither shall they say, Lo here! Or, lo there! For, behold, the Kingdom of God is within you.” The words *within you* should be translated “among you,” or “in your midst.” Jesus Christ, the King of the Kingdom, was in the midst of the Pharisees when He spoke these words.

Often, “king” and “kingdom” are used interchangeably. For example, the “head of gold” in King Nebuchadnezzar’s prophetic dream (Daniel 2) represents the Babylonian kingdom—yet, it also represents the king of Babylon. The prophet Daniel explains, “*Thou [Nebuchadnezzar] art this head of gold. And after thee shall arise another kingdom...*” (verses 38,39).

In the seventh chapter, four beasts representing four *kingdoms* are described as “four *kings*, which shall arise out of the earth” (verse 17).

So when Jesus spoke of the Kingdom of God as if it were present, He simply meant that the Kingdom was present in the *Person* of the king.

The apostle Paul’s reference to a present “Kingdom” has also been misunderstood. He wrote, “Giving all thanks unto the Father...Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the Kingdom of His dear Son” (Colossians 1:12,13).

God’s people are already “in” the Kingdom in the same sense that an heir is already the possessor of his inheritance (see Galatians 4:1). They are “in” the Kingdom in the sense that they have experienced some level of the power of the Kingdom, and have submitted to the rule of the King of the Kingdom.

Several other scriptures seem to suggest that the Kingdom is present. Please note the following:

Matthew 12:20: “but if I [Jesus] cast out devils [demons] by the Spirit of God, then the Kingdom of God is come unto you.”

Mark 12:34: “And when Jesus saw that he answered discretely, He said unto him, Thou are not far from the Kingdom of God...”

Luke 10:6-7: “And into whatsoever city ye enter, and they receive you, eat such things as are set before you: And heal the sick that are therein, and say unto them, The Kingdom of God is come nigh unto you.”

Revelation 1:7: “I John, who also am your brother, and companion in tribulation, and in the Kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, was in the isle that is called Patmos, for the Word of God, and for the testimony of Jesus Christ.”

None of the above passages says that the Kingdom of God has already been established in the earth. Rather, they simply say that the Kingdom is present in power, or in the Person (or Spirit) of the King of the Kingdom, Jesus Christ.

When the disciples went into the various cities casting out demons, healing the sick, and preaching the Kingdom of God, they said “The Kingdom of God is come nigh unto you.” They meant that the means of entry into the Kingdom had been proclaimed, and that the power of the kingdom had been displayed.

John acknowledged his companionship with fellow Christians “in tribulation, and in the Kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ.” He was speaking of the hardships he and other Christians were having to endure, but was speaking with a view toward the *future*. They shared in the Kingdom (or *kingship*) in the sense that they shared the positive assurance that the present distress would one day give way to the glorious Kingdom of God.

The scholars who claim “You can’t have Jesus saying both the kingdom is here and is off in the future,” and who supposedly “take a very careful approach to how saying of Jesus were transmitted and to the evolution of the Bible texts,” need to be much more careful in their evaluation of biblical references to the Kingdom.

Perhaps they are not “maverick scholars,” but who said the *majority* is always right?

Jesus said, concerning the time just preceding His Second Coming, “And *many false prophets* shall rise, and shall *deceive many*” (Matthew 24:11). He said, “Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and *many* there be which go in thereat: Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and *few* there be that find it” (Matthew 7:13,14).

The apostle Peter wrote, “Knowing this first, that there shall come *in the last days* scoffers, walking after their own lusts, And saying, *Where is the promise of His coming?* For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation” (II Peter 3:3,4).

Notice that false prophets, scoffers who deny the Second Coming, and widespread deception are among the prevailing characteristics of the last days. Do these descriptions leave the impression that the scoffers and false prophets will be “mavericks” who have little or no influence?

Hardly! If anything, the widespread influence of liberal theologians and “higher critics” is but one of many signs that the return of Jesus Christ draws near.

Only One Hope for Planet Earth

Even now, in spite of the fact that the Holy Bible is the number one best-seller of all time, religious deception engulfs this world. Rejection of the Second Coming as an article of faith is but one of the many signs of the prophesied *end of the age*.

Jesus Christ spoke of a time when *many* false prophets and false Christs would come in His name, performing great signs and wonders, *and deceiving many*—all this at a time of intense persecution against God’s true people.

With religious deception comes religious *persecution*. And though the pages of history are sprinkled with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus, *we have yet to see the worst of times!*

Jesus said, “then shall they deliver you [Christ’s true followers] up to be *afflicted*, and shall *kill* you: and ye shall be *hated* of all nations *for my name’s sake*. And then shall

many be offended, and shall betray one another, and shall hate one another” (Matthew 24:9,10).

The final martyrdom of saints will come at a time when intense international strife will have reached a pinnacle, resulting in *wars*, which will be followed by massive *famines* and dreadful *disease outbreaks*—a time of unprecedented *global turmoil!*

Jesus warns, “For then shall be *great tribulation*, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be. And except those days should be shortened, *there should no flesh be saved*: but for the elect’s sake those days shall be shortened” (verse 22).

Notice: Without divine intervention, *no flesh* will survive! This prophecy can only be for a time when man has the capacity to destroy all life from off this planet. *We are now living in such a time!*

Humanity is headed toward *destruction*. Unless Almighty God intervenes into the affairs of humankind, there remains no hope for the future of our planet, no hope for our children and our children’s children—no hope at all!

That is why Jesus Christ *must* return!☐

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