

Alliance Position Paper: Christ our Coming King

The Premillennial Coming of the Lord

The return of Jesus Christ to this earth is clearly grounded in scripture. Upon Jesus' ascension to heaven in the book of Acts two men dressed in white spoke. "Men of Galilee," they said, "why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven." (Acts 1:11) This scripture attests to Jesus physical return. Many other scriptures speak to the fact of his second coming.

Jesus' words recorded in Matthew's gospel speak also to a return that is visible to all nations.

"At that time the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and all the nations of the earth will mourn. They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory.
³¹ And he will send his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other. (Matt 24:30-31)

In fact, Zechariah 12 also speaks of this event when they will "look on the one they have pierced."

Within the eschatological timetable the events of Christ's return and defeat of Satan are laid out in Revelation 20. It is clear from this passage that all those who are in Christ, no matter what epoch of time will reign with Christ on this earth for one thousand years. Though some may take this as a figurative period of time no clues from the text will yield to that reasoning. Revelations is the only book that refers to this literal one thousand years, but it does so twice in Rev 20. After the 1,000 years are over Satan is released for a time in which he will deceive

again, but after this will be thrown in the lake of fire forever and ever along with the false prophet and the beast.

The dead that are raised in Revelation 20 take place within two resurrections. At the beginning of the 1,000 years the dead are raised who have been martyred for not worshipping the beast or his image. (Rev 20:4) At the end of the one thousand years everyone else (the unbelievers) is resurrected. (v. 5)

Though Revelation refers to a first and second resurrection, other scriptures will present these events in different groupings. The gospel of John records the words of Jesus, “Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out—those who have done good will rise to live, and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned.” (John 5:28-29) This verse does not explicitly say this will take place at the same time. In fact other verses such as 1 Cor 15 and 1 Thes 4 speak of a believers resurrection.

According to the Lord’s own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep.¹⁶ For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first.¹⁷ After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever.¹⁸ Therefore encourage each other with these words. (1 Thes 4:15-18)

So the second resurrection is for unbelievers. The first resurrection is a believer’s resurrection and takes place at the end of the age, and before the Millennial reign of Christ. This resurrection happens first with the dead in Christ (1 Thes 4:16) and then those believers who are alive at the time of Christ’s return. The dead that are raised and reign with Christ in Rev 20 are also part of this resurrection.

There is much debate about the order of events prior to the millennial reign of Christ. This period is often referred to as the tribulation period and generally spans a time of seven years in the view of some premillennialists.

The series of the Events Following the Rapture of the Church

In the timeline of some premillennialists the rapture of the church takes place at the beginning of a seven-year tribulation period. This comes partly from Daniels seventy sevens (Dan 9), which some believe is a messianic timeline involving sixty-nine sevens (483 years) from the time of Daniel's prophecy until the first coming of Christ and then one more seven year period surrounding the events of Christ's second coming.

Regardless of the time period involved there is an event recorded in scripture called the rapture of the church. The 1 Thes 4 scripture quoted earlier is one supporting scripture as well as the accounts in the gospel of Matthew, "That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. Two men will be in the field; one will be taken and the other left. Two women will be grinding with a hand mill; one will be taken and the other left. (Matt 24:39-41) 2 Thes 2:7 may also be a veiled reference to the rapture of the church: "For the secret power of lawlessness is already at work; but the one who now holds it back will continue to do so till he is taken out of the way." The "one who now holds it back" could be the church, or the Holy Spirit present in the church. In this view, when the rapture occurs the restraining force will be removed. This may coincide with the absence of the church in the book of Revelations after chapter 3.

These two passages from 2 Thes 2 and Rev 13 have some parallels:

The coming of the lawless one will be in accordance with the work of Satan displayed in all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders, and in every sort of evil that deceives those who are perishing. (2 Thes 2:9-10)

And he performed great and miraculous signs, even causing fire to come down from heaven to earth in full view of men. Because of the signs he was given power to do on behalf of the first beast, he deceived the inhabitants of the earth. (Rev 13:13-14)

For many who adhere to a pre-tribulation or mid-tribulation rapture, the church will not be present when this man of lawlessness is revealed and when many on the earth will be forced

to receive a “mark of the beast”. This is the number “666” which has received infamous attention in recent years. (Rev 13:17-18)

There are also many saints who believe in a post-tribulation rapture of the church. For example the scripture in Rev 7 which speaks of the great throng from every tribe and language and people and nation is explained by one of the twenty-four elders around the throne to be those “who have come out of the great tribulation;” and “they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.” (Rev 7:14)

The Relationship Between the Imminent Parousia and World Evangelism

The Parousia or the second coming of Christ is closely linked to world evangelism according to Matthew 24:14. “And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached throughout the world as a witness to all nations, and then the end will come.” Considering the vast array of people in attendance in heaven who have come out of the great tribulation demonstrates the result of this worldwide evangelization. “After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands.” (Rev 7:9)

In addition one needs to consider the verses referring to the great commission, such as Matt 28:8-20 and more importantly Acts 1:4-11. In these verses the disciples inquire about the restoration of the kingdom. Jesus reply instead is the commission to be His witnesses to Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and to the “ends of the earth.” There is no other precondition to Christ’s return, rather the order to preach the gospel.

That Christ’s return is imminent is also clear, the writer of Hebrews exhorts his readers: “You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he

has promised.³⁷ For in just a very little while, “He who is coming will come and will not delay.” (Heb 10:37) One must also consider the many references in scripture to the Lord’s return as a “thief in the night.” “Now, brothers, about times and dates we do not need to write to you,^{for} you know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night.” (1 Thes 5:1-2) (See also Matt 24:43, Luke 12:39, 1 Thes 5:4, 2 Pet 3:10, Rev 3:3, Rev 16:15)

A reconciliation between the necessity to preach the gospel “to the ends of the earth” before “the end” (Matt 24:14) and the Lord’s returning as a “thief in the night” could simply be put forth that “the end” will not take place immediately at the rapture of the church. The preaching of the gospel could still continue by the “tribulation saints” before “the end.” This scenario may not bode well to amillennialists or post-millennialists, or even for those who advocate a post-tribulation rapture. Whatever may be the course of events, what is clearly taught from scripture is the mandate to preach the gospel to speed His return. (Matt 24:14) Likewise, no indication is given that any event must occur for the Lord to return for his people, (i.e. “the rapture”, 1 Thes 4, Matt 24). His return will be as a thief, the resolution of the tension between “difficult” passages does not diminish the import of either point of view. We are to be dutiful in what scripture commands and seek the Lord for understanding while we wait for His return.

My Testimony and Understanding Concerning Christ the Coming King

I believe the return of Jesus Christ is imminent. This is not to say it could not be another thousand years until His return, but it is to say it could happen at any moment as several of the above scriptures demonstrate. The many attempts (past, present and future) to place a date on the Lord’s return are futile. The Lord specifically says that no one knows “the day or the hour” except the Father. (Matt 24:36) The general time of His return may be discerned, here Jesus’ words. “Now learn this lesson from the fig tree: As soon as its twigs get tender and its leaves

come out, you know that summer is near. Even so, when you see all these things, you know that it is near, right at the door. (Matt 24:32-33) However, wisdom implores us not to be overly concerned with even the month or year of His return, but rather to “be ready” for His return.

The many “predictions” about his return may arouse interest to unbelievers and nominal Christians, but as these predictions fail, so does the fledgling faith of many who have pinned their hope on a “day or hour.” Hence Peter’s admonition, “First of all, you must understand that in the last days scoffers will come, scoffing and following their own evil desires. They will say, “Where is this ‘coming’ he promised? Ever since our fathers died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation.” (2 Peter 3:3-4)

Whereas, the study and timing of the Lord’s return makes for excellent debate and even fantasy in terms of books and movies, the believer’s main task in this regard is to “preach the gospel” and “be ready.” However, I agree banking on the Temple in Jerusalem to be built before the Lord’s return, before repenting and accepting the Lord is not a safe bet. Even if one could correctly discern the timeline of events and know for certain the exact time of the Lord’s return, no one is guaranteed tomorrow. Having a right relationship with the Lord and each other is important because he commands it, especially as we “see the day approaching.” (Heb 10:25)