



martyrs  
EVANGELICAL CHURCH

# autumn teaching week

## *The End Times*

Monday 24<sup>th</sup> - Friday 28<sup>th</sup> October 2011  
Dr Alan Cairns



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## A TEACHING WEEK FOR ALL CHRISTIANS

Hosted by Martyrs Youth Fellowship

*'...Tell us, when shall these things be?  
and what shall be the sign of thy coming,  
and of the end of the world?'*

Matt 24:3



## THE END TIMES

### The King Is Coming!

#### I. The Promise of His Coming

“The Lord shall come! This is the burden of the last book of Scripture. It was the burden of the Old Testament; for Enoch’s prophecy runs through all its books, *Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousand of his saints*. It is the burden of the New Testament, for both the Master and His apostles give out the same solemn utterance, *Behold, he cometh*; and the church in the early ages took up the subject as of the profoundest and most pressing interest, *looking for that blessed hope*.”  
Horatius Bonar, *Light & Truth*, vol. 5, p. 18

#### A. Some Scripture Statements of the Promise

1. Matthew 16:27; Mark 8:38; Luke 21:27; John 14:3
2. Acts 1:11
3. 1 Corinthians 15:51-53
4. 1 Thessalonians 3:13; 4:15-17
5. 2 Thessalonians 1:7-10
6. 2 Timothy 4:1, 8
7. Titus 2:13
8. Hebrews 9:26
9. 2 Peter 3:10-13
10. 1 John 2:28; 3:2
11. Jude 14
12. Revelation 1:7; 22:7, 12, 20

#### B. These are as yet unfulfilled.

The argument to establish this truth will be plain as we proceed.

1. It is sufficient for the moment to note that there are those who adopt what is called *realized eschatology*, that effectively makes all the statements about the Second Coming refer to events already passed. The method of accomplishing this is often the method of interpretation known as *form criticism*, by which much of the testimony of the New Testament writings is dismissed as unhistorical—that is, it is deemed an unauthentic addition to the original teaching of Jesus.
2. Others who adopt the view that most if not all of the above texts have already been fulfilled adopt what is known as *preterism*, the theory that the fall of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. followed by the worldwide success of the gospel despite all opposition, not a future destruction followed by the return of Christ, is the focus of New Testament prophecy.

#### C. Though long awaited, their fulfilment is certain.

## II. The Manner of His Coming

- A. Undivided—not a two-stage coming
- B. Sudden, Matthew 24:27; Luke 17:26-30; 1 Thessalonians 5:2-3; 2 Peter 3:10; Revelation 3:3; 16:15
- C. Visible, Revelation 1:7
- D. Glorious, Matthew 16:27; 26:64; Titus:2:13
- E. Victorious, Daniel 7:13-14; 2 Thessalonians 1:7-10

## III. The Place of His Coming

Mount of Olives, Zechariah 14:4, Acts 1:11

## IV. The Time of His Coming

- A. Precisely: as to the day and hour, known only to God, Mark 13:32
- B. Relatively, it is clearly defined:
  - 1. It follows certain signs that will allow God's people to know that it is drawing nigh, Matthew 24:15; Luke 21:28.
  - 2. It is after the tribulation, Matthew 24:29.
  - 3. It takes place at the last trump, 1 Corinthians 15:52.
  - 4. It takes place at the resurrection of the dead saints, 1 Thessalonians 4:16; what is called *the first resurrection*, Revelation 20:4-6.

## V. The Signs of His Coming

### A. Signs taken from Matthew 24:1-35 (cf. Mark 13; Luke 21)

- 1. Note the three questions of verse 3.
  - In the verses that follow the Lord gives the answer:
    - a. **Verses 4-8 answer the question, *When shall these things be?***
    - b. **Verses 9-28 answer, *What shall be the sign of thy coming?***
    - c. **Verse 29-35 answer, *And of the end of the world?*** (Greek = *consummation of the age*; thus not the termination of the world but the heading up the events of this age to their appointed climax).
- 2. The Overthrow of Jerusalem and the Destruction of the Temple: v. 4-8
  - a. The destruction of the temple in Jerusalem (cf. v. 2) does not mark the end (Greek *telos*=termination, final result), verse 6, though it does foreshadow the final overthrow of the city.
  - b. The Lord warns against premature conclusions regarding the end of the age, verse 6.
  - c. Before the end, there will be *wars and rumours of wars* with *nation rising up against nation*.
  - d. *Famines, pestilences, earthquakes in divers places*.

These are things that have occurred throughout human history. So why are they mentioned. Probably as a corrective against the notion that earthly society will be perfected before the Lord returns.

- e. These things mark *the beginning of sorrows*, verse 8—literally *the beginning of birth pangs*, the time of Israel's great travail (cf. Isaiah 66:7).

This term does a lot to explain some important matters:

- i. The connection of the fall of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. with its final conflict and affliction.
- ii. The significance of the years of affliction that the Jewish people have experienced, described in the following section.
- iii. The divine purpose in the tribulation that will afflict Israel: it is part of the process that leads to the nation's repentance and consequent restoration.

3. The Sign of Christ's *Coming* (*parousia*, arrival and presence)

- a. Persecutions, betrayals, false prophets, abounding iniquity, *the love of the many* [note "*the many*"—it means the majority] *waxing cold*, *the gospel of the kingdom preached in all the world* [*oikumene* = the inhabited earth] *for a witness to all nations*, verses 9-14.

Clearly, Christ has now gone beyond speaking merely of Jews and is addressing His believing people, for only they had any love for Him or would preach the gospel.

- b. Verse 14b says, *THEN* (*tote*, at that time) *shall the end* [*telos*, the final result of all that has been happening] *come*.
- c. Verse 15 gives one specific sign of the near approach of the Lord's coming: *the abomination of desolation* prophesied by Daniel, an event that would herald the final assault on Jerusalem.
- d. Many refer this to the fall of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. It certainly does describe an event like it, but remember the question our Lord was answering. He was asked about His *coming*, Greek *parousia*, meaning *arrival* [leading to His] *presence*. Thus any explanation that finds the fulfillment of these words in the events of 70 A.D. has to hold that Jesus' *arrival* on earth took place at around then.
- f. Though some scholars undertake to defend this interpretation, it is far-fetched and if allowed could be applied to just about every reference to the Second Coming, thus destroying the entire doctrine. So, while the fall of Jerusalem to Titus may be seen as the foreshadowing of the climactic events here prophesied, it cannot be the definitive fulfillment.

- g. In support of this, note the reference to Daniel's prophecy, verse 15. Proponents of the 70 A.D. theory have to conclude that *Daniel did not actually prophesy the event here mentioned*. They insist that Daniel's prophecy referred to the action of Antiochus Epiphanes (2<sup>nd</sup> century B.C.), who offered a sow on the temple altar and provoked the Maccabean revolt. That this action is akin to what will happen is undoubted, *but Jesus says that Daniel actually was speaking of a desecration that was yet future in as He spoke*.
- h. We are commanded to make sure we understand what Daniel says, verse 15*b*.
- i. Daniel 8:23-25. This prophecy is for "the end of time," v. 17 and the vision was to be *shut up for many days*, v. 26
  - ii. Daniel 9:27. The person referred to is not Christ but Antichrist. It is not Titus the Roman governor, for his history does not accord with what is prophesied here. And, beyond question, the event prophesied reaches to *the consummation* and the judgment of God on the *desolator*.
  - iii. Daniel 11:31. The time of pollution of the sanctuary is established: it is *at the time appointed*, verse 28; *it is yet for a time appointed*, verse 35; *at that time* (when Michael shall stand up for Israel), which will be a time of unparalleled tribulation, 12:1; a time when everyone found *written in the book* will be *delivered*.  
Daniel 12:2 sets the climax of this time as the day of the resurrection of the saints.
- j. In the light of all this, Christ's reference to Daniel's prophecy cannot mean anything but a prophecy that is yet to be fulfilled, an event that will be the sure indication that the coming of the Lord is very near.
- k. The Lord's description of that coming is given in Matthew 24:27. What conclusively proves that it is the yet future Second Coming of Christ that is in view is this:  
"The coming, in this verse, is the same as the coming in the disciples' question; which again is the same as the coming in the last verse of the preceding chapter; and which must be future, because the Jews have not yet said, 'Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord.'" B. W. Newton, *Watching & Waiting*, Oct.-Dec., 2011, p. 312.
- l. Note well: Here we have more definitive proof that the great burden of Matthew 24 is not the fall of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. but its yet future unparalleled tribulation that will be followed by the sign of the Son of man in the heaven.

This is borne out by Old Testament prophecies to the same effect:  
Zechariah 12:9-10; 13:8-14:4.

- m. Verse 28 marks His coming as a time of judgment on His enemies. See Job 39:30 for the basis for this interpretation.
4. The Sign of the *consummation of the age*, verse 29-35
- a. *Immediately after the tribulation*, verse 29 there are signs in the heavens.  
Some have argued that these are figures that do not refer to the literal heavens. But the reference to *the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven*, v. 30, shows that we are to take the words literally. Compare Haggai 2:6-7 with Hebrews 12:27-28; Isaiah 24:1, 19-20.
- b. *Then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven*, verse 30.  
What is that sign? The word *OF* has many possible meanings. Here I take it to be what is called an objective genitive, meaning, *the sign which is the Son of man in the heaven*, His *arrival in the clouds of the heaven with power and great glory*, a sign that will be seen by all the peoples of earth and that will cause them to wail in anguish.
- c. Verse 33: these are the signs God will give that Christ is *even at the doors*.
- d. Thus the *consummation of the age*, the coming together of all that will mark the consummation of the age, will be the glorious return of our Lord Jesus Christ.
- e. Verse 34 has been explained in a number of ways:
- i. Those who take Matthew 24 to refer only to the fall of Jerusalem see it as proof of their theory. But does history actually record anything like an entire fulfilment of this passage?
  - ii. Many see *this generation* as being contemporaneous with *these things*, meaning that it refers to the generation alive when the signs come to pass. In other words, once the process starts it will speedily hasten to its conclusion.
  - iii. There is a little particle in the Greek text (*an* used with a subjunctive verb) that may support this explanation: *Till all these things be fulfilled* ignores this entirely. This construction always denotes something uncertain or hypothetical. Here we may translate: *This generation shall not pass, if perhaps all these things were fulfilled.*

In other words, it is not saying that all these things would be fulfilled in the generation then living, but that *if they were, they would take place in the life time of that generation.*

- iv. Some scholars point out that the Greek *genea*, translated generation, also has the meaning of *race*.

“The meaning of our Lord I understand to be this: that the present race of Jews, whose identity was marked by their hardness of heart and perverse rejection of the hand of God whensoever and howsoever manifested, should not pass away and be succeeded by that new race ‘whom men should name priests of the Lord and ministers of our God;’ or, in other words, the age of Israel’s obduracy and rejection should not cease and be succeeded by the coming age of glory under Messiah’s rule, until all these things had first occurred, i.e. until they had drunk to ‘the dregs the cup of trembling and wrung them out’ (Isaiah 51:17).”

B.W. Newton, *Watching and Waiting*, p. 315.

#### **B. Signs from Matthew 24: 36-51**

1. The last days will be marked by great carnal indulgence, like *the days of Noe*, verse 38.
2. And by careless unpreparedness, verse 39ff
3. Hypocrisy rampant in professing church, marked by faithlessness among the professed servants of Christ, verse 48, 51.

#### **C. Signs taken from 2 Thessalonians 2**

1. The day of Christ, His coming to earth, is not yet present, verse 1-2
2. It cannot come until there is first a great apostasy, verse 3.
3. And until the man of sin is revealed, *uncovered*, and runs his wicked course verse 2ff

#### **D. Signs from 2 Timothy**

1. Chapter 3:1-5 gives 19 marks of end time declension. These were evident throughout church history, but will especially mark the end time.
2. The opposition of demonically empowered false prophets, as Moses encountered, 3:8—again, always so but especially in the end time, v. 13.
3. Chapter 4:1-4—widespread rejection of sober gospel truth in the professing church (cf. 1 Timothy 4:1-3).

#### **E. Signs from 2 Peter**

Chapter 3:3 warns of scoffers who will deny the truth of Christ’s return.



## VI. The Hope of His Coming

- A. It is a blessed hope, Titus, 2:13.
- B. It is a sanctifying hope, 1 John 3:3.
- C. It is a fortifying hope, 1 Peter 4:13; 2 Timothy 41, 8.

So there are three great themes of immediate practical importance associated with the doctrine of the Second Coming: HOPE, HOLINESS, HELP in time of need.

“It was no minor hope to the primitive saints. It cheered them at parting with their Lord, and it comforted them at parting with one another. It upheld them in evil days; it nerved them for warfare; it gave them patience under persecution; it animated them in their work; it kept alive their zeal; it enabled them to look calmly round upon an evil world, and to face its mustering storms; it showed them resurrection and glory, fixing their eye upon scenes beyond the deathbed and the tomb; it ever reminded them of the day of meeting, when Jesus will gather all His own together, and they that have slept in Him shall awake to glory, honour, and immortality.” Horatius Bonar, *Light & Truth*, vol. 5, p. 18

## VII. The Final Application of the Doctrine to Believers

It is amazing that the whole creation, which now groans because of sin and the curse it brings (Romans 8:22), will *welcome* the Lord's glorious coming (Psalm 96:11-13) while men alone will *wail*, literally *smite their breasts*, *mourn* (Revelation 1:7).

In contrast with the world's dread of Christ's return, we should constantly live in light of it, governed and guided by the glorious truth that *we shall see him as he is*. **THUS:**

- A. We should live in a state of readiness to meet Christ: Matthew 24:44.
- B. We should be watchful and prayerful: Matthew 24:32-33, 42-46; Luke 21:34-36; Mark 13:33, 37; 1 Peter 4:7.
- C. We should live in expectation of Christ's return: 2 Peter 3:11-12.
- D. We should live with a bright testimony: Luke 12:35-36.
- E. We should live so as not to be ashamed when we meet the Lord: 1 John 2:28.