

Could Christ Return This Year?

Why Biblical Prophecy Should Impact Your Thinking

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The Biblical answer to the burning question raised in our title is – yes and no!

Yes, He could return from heaven at any moment now to meet His true church – His body and bride – in the air. And, therefore, no – He will not come down to the earth during the next 12 months. His return to the earth will occur seven years after the church has been caught up to heaven.

Why does the Bible make this distinction? Because the second coming of our Lord, just like His first coming, is a complex series of events covering a number of years. Think for a moment of the first coming. It began with the miraculous conception of the God/man in the womb of a Jewish woman about 4 B.C. Then came His birth, growth, public ministry, death, burial, resurrection and ascension back to heaven – requiring more than a third of a century.

So also the second coming of Christ will cover a number of years, beginning with the resurrection of dead Christians and the rapture of living Christians (1 Thess. 4:13-18). Then, for the church, there will be a period of examination by her Bridegroom to determine gain or loss of rewards (1 Cor. 3:5-15), culminating in "the marriage of the Lamb" (Rev. 19:7; cf. vv. 8, 9).

In the meantime, a number of spectacular things will take place on the earth requiring 84 months, or seven years, before He sets foot again on this planet (cf. Zech. 14:4; Rev. 11:1-3). Two witnesses will suddenly appear in Jerusalem, one of whom will be Elijah (cf. Mal. 4:5, 6; Rev. 11:4-6). After they have led the nation of Israel back to God, they will be killed by the Antichrist (cf. Matt. 17:11; Rev. 11:7-13). But during the last three-and-a-half years of the Tribulation period, 144,000 of their disciples, from the 12 tribes of

Israel, will take "this gospel of the kingdom...to all the nations" (Matt. 24:14; cf. Rev. 7:3-8; 14:1-5).

As soon as the church is removed from the earth (cf. John 14:1-3; 2 Thess. 2:1-8), "another horn, a little one" ((Dan. 7:8; i.e., the antichrist or "the beast" [Rev. 13:2]) will be launched by Christ Himself on his steady march to global dominion (cf. Rev. 6:1-2). "He shall confirm a covenant with many (the majority of Israelis) for one week (a seven-year period)" (Dan. 9:27), leading them to international prestige.

But after 42 months, the Antichrist is killed (presumably by the King of the North; Dan. 11:40-45; cf. Rev. 13:14), rises again to mortal life and kills his arch-enemies, the two witnesses (Rev. 11:7-13). He then turns against Israel (which is by now a basically converted nation; cf. Isa. 66:8; Rev. 12:1-6, 13-16), stops the Temple sacrifices (cf. Dan. 9:27), sets up "the *'abomination of desolation'*" in the Temple of God (Matt. 24:15) and demands worship of himself with horrible consequences for those who refuse to submit (cf. Rev. 13:11-17). Under Satan's direction, he will gather the armies of the world to challenge the Lord Jesus Christ at His glorious second coming to the earth (cf. Ps. 2:1-6; Rev. 16:12-16; 19:19).

By means of these complex events, God will prepare the church, the nation of Israel and the Gentile nations for His glorious 1,000-year kingdom on earth.

But when will all of this begin to happen? We wish we knew – but our Lord warned us about setting the date. "But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father" (Mark 13:32).

Now think of this statement: Our Lord knew that the exact date was unknown to all mere humans, to all of heaven's angels and even to Himself (during the non-glorified phase of His incarnation). The Lord Jesus had set aside the independent exercise of certain attributes of greatness (such as omniscience) at His first coming (Phil. 2:5-8; cf. Luke 2:52). But He remained totally divine and sinless and received from His Father a perfect

understanding of the temporary limits of His knowledge (cf. John 5:20).

The year ahead could see the beginning of second coming events! For believers today, this is the blessed hope, for we know that "when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is" (1 John 3:2). But for all mankind, our Lord gave this urgent warning: "Take heed, watch and pray; for you do not know when the time is... And what I say to you, I say to all: Watch!" (Mark 13:33, 37).

To which we should joyfully reply: "Even so, come, Lord Jesus!" (Rev. 22:20).

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