

23“Then if anyone says to you, ‘Behold, here is the Christ,’ or ‘There He is,’ do not believe him. 24“For false Christs and false prophets will arise and will show great signs and wonders, so as to mislead, if possible, even the elect. 25“Behold, I have told you in advance. 26“So if they say to you, ‘Behold, He is in the wilderness,’ do not go out, or, ‘Behold, He is in the inner rooms,’ do not believe them. 27“For just as the lightning comes from the east and flashes even to the west, so will the coming of the Son of Man be. 28“Wherever the corpse is, there the vultures will gather.

29“*But immediately after the tribulation of those days THE SUN WILL BE DARKENED, AND THE MOON WILL NOT GIVE ITS LIGHT, AND THE STARS WILL FALL* from the sky, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. 30“*And then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the SON OF MAN COMING ON THE CLOUDS OF THE SKY* with power and great glory. 31“*And He will send forth His angels with A GREAT TRUMPET and THEY WILL GATHER TOGETHER His elect from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other.*

The Day of the Lord. The phrase appears about 18 times in the Bible and is referenced in roughly 1/4th of the Bible.

Millions of christians mindlessly pray for the Day of the Lord every time they mumble the Lord's prayer. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth, like it is in heaven.

Folks, that prayer is what this book is about. Creation. It was good. Lost by chapter 3 of Genesis. And the entire rest of the story is about regaining this rebellious planet.

Something God could have done instantly by the decree of the breath of His mouth, sweeping all of the rebellors into the hell they deserve, but it pleased God to redeem lost men instead, and that required a plan of redemption that has been happening in parallel alongside the rebellion for 6000 years.

The age of patriarchs. Then a chosen nation from the loins of the

patriarchs. Then a promised messiah from that nation who, according to Daniels chapter 9 prophecy comes "to finish the transgression, to make an end of sin, to make atonement for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy and to anoint the most holy place".

All of the damage and desolation brought on this earth by Satans rebellion and sin will be undone by Messiah. The curse is reversed. Evil is punished and put away with some finality. But these events don't happen quietly.

The parousia, the arrival of the King is cataclysmic on a scale not seen since creation itself. When you pray the Lords prayer and ask for His kingdom to come you're asking for a cataclysmic event to happen. Satan isn't going to let go of his dominion on this earth quietly and without a fight.

It doesn't happen like a transition team in the White House. And with that short introduction let's look at the event itself along with some of the surrounding events. Jesus isn't minimalist or secretive about this. There's a LOT in the Bible that is descriptive of The Day of the Lord. The day Jesus returns and crushes evil and sets up His reign on earth instead of Satan.

Obviously, that happens in a day, but only after 7 years of turmoil and chaos that increases exponentially as the time line expands. So often the "Day of the Lord" is a term that includes many of the end time events, and especially the immediately end time events just prior to His ultimate return.

Last week we ended with thoughts of Israel fleeing to safety, to a place God has prepared for them. When they see the abomination of desolation set up in the holy place, it's time for believing Israel to RUN. And God protects them for 1260 days.

Vs. 23 hearkens immediately back to that event. 23 *"Then if anyone says to you, 'Behold, here is the Christ,' or 'There He is,' do not believe him.*

We don't know what or how this safe place is or works, they will know, we don't need to, but Satan would like to get them out of there so he can get at them, and how does he do that? By lies of intrigue. 23 *“Then if anyone says to you, ‘Behold, here is the Christ,’ or ‘There He is,’ do not believe him.*

Come on out of your place! The Lord is here! He's over there.

24 *“For false Christs and false prophets will arise and will show great signs and wonders, so as to mislead, if possible, even the elect. 25 “Behold, I have told you in advance.*

I've been reading those verses now for over 40 years as a believer but the aha moment, at least for me, is the reality of the possibility that this is speaking of something like what Islamic prophecy of end times events describes.

Their prophecys of the future parallel ours, except their good guys are our bad guys. They have the Mahdi. A charismatic one world ruler who is a strong man who miraculously brings the whole world together in a nervous peace.

He has a right hand man. Jesus, who comes back from heaven, who can do amazing miracles. The whole world is going to follow them. Well, that's what our book says too, except it's anti-christ, and the what? False prophet.

So, think about this with me. You've got a miraculous world peace. Humpty dumpty has put the broken world back together again and it's nothing short of a miracle. Everyone is saying, *"Who is like the beast? Who can wage war against it?"* Rev. 13:4

And the false prophet is doing miracles. Fantastic miracles. Does that not make these words of Jesus come alive with meaning?

23 *“Then if anyone says to you, ‘Behold, here is the Christ,’ or ‘There He is,’ do not believe him. 24 “For false Christs and false prophets will*

arise and will show great signs and wonders, so as to mislead, if possible, even the elect. 25 "Behold, I have told you in advance.

I became a christian on August 26th 1970. Many of you weren't born yet. It only took days for my new faith to be tested.

We had neighbors across the street who were completely caught up in the blossoming charismatic movement. Pentacostalism had broken out of it's denominational bounds that had held it since 1901, and a movement was about beginning in the 1960's and going full force in the 1970's.

Miracles galore. Faith healings. Speaking in tongues. The neighbors invited me to go to a bible study. OK, I'm in for that. But the bible study turned out to be a room full of people speaking in glossalalia, gibberish, and me looking around going yikes. These are not normal folks.

Then a prophet breaks in. *Someone in the room is not in harmony with us. Perhaps they should wait in the foyer during this part.* More glossalalia. Everybody slobbering who knows what all at the same time. I'm really getting uncomfortable.

Another prophecy. *Whoever it is that's not in harmony should either get in harmony, just say hallelujah over and over* (with your eyes rolled back in your head, I'm thinking). A third prophecy from a different person. *We're all in harmony. No one should leave. We're all one.*

And a week old christian says, OK, that's 2 prophecy's from 2 spirits that disagree with each other, and I count fingers, yep, there's only 1 Holy spirit, so that's one too many, and I get up and make my way out.

Later I studied church history to learn that the miracles that the apostles witnessed at the birth of the church were gone before the New Testament was even finished. Gone for 19 centuries. Back now? Not in my Bible.

The next place we see miracles appear, after the apostolic era of the

birth of the church, is right here folks. So, in my troubled thinking, what could possibly be more dangerous than people who claim to be christians toying with phony miracles. And prophecies. And glossalalia, which by the way appears in all kinds of ecstatic paganism. That is just playing with fire.

And then the anti-christ comes along and the false prophet, who claims to be Jesus, returned from heaven, joins the anti-christ, and proves he is who he says he is with miracles. Way better miracles than the faith healers and tongues speakers have got. Real miracles. So, what's their defense? They swung the door open to miracles in 1960. Satan's going to give them some miracles.

*23 "Then if anyone says to you, 'Behold, here is the Christ,' or 'There He is,' do not believe him. 24 "For false Christs and false prophets will arise and will show **great signs and wonders, so as to mislead, if possible, even the elect.** 25 "Behold, I have told you in advance.*

Behold. I have told you in advance. I'm not quite done with the charismatics. The ecstatic experience trumps everything. So they go to the book and try to find things to make a match possible, but in the end, the ecstasy trumps the book. 25 "*Behold, I have told you in advance.*

After the birth of the church, the apostolic era, the first perhaps 40 years maybe, miracles are what Satan does. And the 21st century charismatic movement is just paving the way. And Jesus, the real one, says; 25 "*Behold, I have told you in advance.*"

Do I believe in miracles? Absolutely!! Every time God, in grace, quickens someone from the dead and makes them alive together with Christ, brought back from the deadness of sin, that's a miracle. Every answered prayer is a miracle. God, stirring in our midst, in our hearts, in corporate worship, is a miracle. Don't look for me with my fractured wrist in the faith healer line though.

Vs. 26 is the logical conclusion to everything He's just warned them about.

26 *“So if they say to you, ‘Behold, He is in the wilderness,’ do not go out, or, ‘Behold, He is in the inner rooms,’ do not believe them.*

Why? Next verse.

27 *“**For** just as the lightning comes from the east and flashes even to the west, so will the coming of the Son of Man be.*

When the parousia happens, when Jesus comes, it will be unmistakable. Every eye will witness it, all at the same time. Just like lightning instantly lights up a whole sky, the thick darkness upon the whole world will light up with Glory when Jesus returns to this world.

Now Jesus says something a little bizarre and we wonder how it fits with the rest. I'm going to give you my thoughts, as usual. Add a couple bucks and they're good for a coffee at Starbucks.

28 *“Wherever the corpse is, there the vultures will gather.*

What in the world? Jesus is giving warnings about false prophets who can do miracles and are claiming to be Him, back from heaven. And He's arguing that His re-entry, His parousia, is unmistakable.

If some guy is doing miracles and claiming to be Jesus back from heaven, and the whole world didn't witness Him coming, at the same time, in terror, it's not Him. And here, I believe He alludes to a rather bizarre one time event that the world will witness.

Listen to what some of the other Bible authors say about this one time phenomenon.

Ezekiel 39:17

"As for you, son of man, thus says the Lord GOD, 'Speak to every kind of bird and to every beast of the field, "Assemble and come, gather from every side to My sacrifice which I am going to sacrifice for you, as a great sacrifice on the mountains of Israel, that you may eat flesh and drink blood.

Revelation 19:17, 18

Then I saw an angel standing in the sun, and he cried out in a loud voice to all the birds flying overhead, "Come, gather together for the great supper of God, so that you may eat the flesh of kings and commanders and mighty men, of horses and riders, of all men slave and free, small and great."

Jeremiah 25:33 *"Those slain by the LORD on that day will be from one end of the earth to the other. They will not be lamented, gathered or buried; they will be like dung on the face of the ground.*

7:32 "Therefore, behold, days are coming," declares the LORD, "when it will no longer be called Topheth, or the valley of the son of Hinnom, but the valley of the Slaughter; for they will bury in Topheth because there is no other place. 33" The dead bodies of this people will be food for the birds of the sky and for the beasts of the earth; and no one will frighten them away.

Revelation 19:21

And the rest were killed with the sword that proceeded from the mouth of the One seated on the horse. And all the birds gorged themselves on their flesh.

This is not hyperbole added for dramatic effect. This is pre-written history. So if you've got a guy claiming to be Jesus, who does miracles, you might want to ask; Well, if you're Jesus, where is the great slaughter, and the birds, who are going to eat your flesh, and turn you into dung, on the ground.

It probably wouldn't go well for you, but you could ask that question, because that's one of the events that coincides with the parousia, the coming of Jesus, to depose Satan, and all enemies, and take back this world.

It's almost ironic humor that our God will use birds to turn the mightiest and fiercest of warriors into . . dung. Take that, mighty men. It smacks of Moses, grinding the molten image of the calf into dust, and forcing the people to eat it, so that the golden idol becomes, what? Feces.

That's what God turns idols and mighty warriors who oppose Him, into.

Now then, we get all the preliminaries dealt with, false Christs and miracle workers, and we get right down to the event itself.

And there is some chronological order to the way Jesus has been presenting the events surrounding the parousia, and the event itself. False christs. Satanic miracles. False prophets. False worship. The whole world will worship the anti-christ . . or die. And then the cataclysmic entrance of God. In the sky.

29“But immediately after the tribulation of those days THE SUN WILL BE DARKENED, AND THE MOON WILL NOT GIVE ITS LIGHT, AND THE STARS WILL FALL from the sky, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. 30“And then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the SON OF MAN COMING ON THE CLOUDS OF THE SKY with power and great glory.

Revelation chapter 6 is the parallel account and adds to our understanding. It paints an image for us with words that explains the panic, the terror, of having been at war with God, and seeing your doom approaching.

12 I looked when He broke the sixth seal, and there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth made of hair, and the whole moon became like blood; 13and the stars of the sky fell to the earth, as a fig tree casts its unripe figs when shaken by a great wind. 14The sky was split apart like a scroll when it is rolled up, and every mountain and island were moved out of their places. 15Then the kings of the earth and the great men and the commanders and the rich and the strong and every slave and free man hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains; 16and they said to the mountains and to the rocks, “Fall on us and hide us from the presence of Him who sits on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb; 17for the great day of their wrath has come, and who is able to stand?”

This is the same group that said; "Who is like the beast? Who can wage

war against it?" Rev. 13:4

Now in sheer terror they are saying *to the mountains and to the rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the presence of Him who sits on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb; 17for the great day of their wrath has come, and who is able to stand?"*

The sky is ripped open and the throne of God is in open view. And the conquering Lamb is coming down to earth. And Jeremiah says; 30:5 *"For thus says the LORD, 'I have heard a sound of terror, Of dread, and there is no peace. 6Ask now, and see If a male can give birth. Why do I see every man With his hands on his loins, as a woman in childbirth? And why have all faces turned pale? 7'Alas! for that day is great, There is none like it; And it is the time of Jacob's distress, But he will be saved from it....*

Enemies of the Bible look at this and say, see, this was written by goat herds with minds like children. The sky is falling. The sky is falling. How foolish. Those stars are billions of miles from us, they can't fall like figs.

And I would caution that much of the chaos that Revelation describes can be caused by a meteor collision with earth. So be careful what you say about goat herds.

Further, the Bible gives evidence that the sky we see and science measures and looks into with telescopes is simply a firmament that hides God from our view. This passage speaks of that reality as the sky is torn assunder and the throne of God is in full view.

The disciples asked Jesus, if you're leaving, and Jerusalem is left as a desolate place, what will the parousia, the entrance of the authority to reign of the King, what does that look like? How does this work.

They were thinking very small. David's throne, In Jerusalem. The reign of Jesus. Kick out the Romans. Clean up the false religion. They thought it would happen later that week. So, they ask Him, if not now, when. What will it look like, if this temple is going to be dismantled

and Jerusalem is going to be made a waste place, and you're leaving. How does this work. What does it look like.

And we just read the Lord Jesus answer to them. When the conquering Lamb comes, and removes Satan to his place, and slaughters all of His enemies, after the sky is ripped open and the throne of God is in view and all the tribes of the earth mourn in terror.

After the slaughter, and the bodies are piled into the valley of Ben Hinnom, and the birds have their feast and turn the mighty men of the world into dung, then He sets up His throne in Jerusalem and reigns over an edenic earth filled with righteousness and glory, for a thousand years.

Well, we have one verse left to look at in our reading, and then I have a short article that I want to read in it's entirety on this topic of the second coming.

Vs. 31 "And He will send forth His angels with A GREAT TRUMPET and THEY WILL GATHER TOGETHER His elect from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other.

This little passage is somewhat obscure. It is not the rapture. We meet the Lord in the air, not His angels.

I think a possibility that makes sense is that, because of all the promises given to Israel, they will be brought from far away to near in order to witness and partake in the great promised salvation of Jerusalem.

Listen to 2 of the greatest prophets and see if perhaps this event fits well here;

Deuteronomy 30:4

"If your outcasts are at the ends of the earth, from there the LORD your God will gather you, and from there He will bring you back.

Isaiah 27:13

It will come about also in that day that a great trumpet will be blown,

and those who were perishing in the land of Assyria and who were scattered in the land of Egypt will come and worship the LORD in the holy mountain at Jerusalem.

Perhaps Revelation 14 speaks of something similar;

6And I saw another angel flying in midheaven, having an eternal gospel to preach to those who live on the earth, and to every nation and tribe and tongue and people; 7and he said with a loud voice, "Fear God, and give Him glory, because the hour of His judgment has come; worship Him who made the heaven and the earth and sea and springs of waters."

8And another angel, a second one, followed, saying, "Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great, she who has made all the nations drink of the wine of the passion of her immorality."

And Joel 2; 30 - 32 rings true;

*30 "I will display wonders in the sky and on the earth,
Blood, fire and columns of smoke.*

*31 "The sun will be turned into darkness
And the moon into blood
Before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes.*

*32 "And it will come about that whoever calls on the name of the
LORD*

*Will be delivered;
For on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem
There will be those who escape,
As the LORD has said,
Even among the survivors whom the LORD calls.*

Finally, to end our thoughts this morning on the most important topic and event in all of the Bible, bear with me a few moments longer as I read a blog published at the Master's Seminary and written by none other than John MacArthur.

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Christ could come at any moment. I believe that with all my heart—not because of what I read in the newspapers, but because of what I read in Scripture.

From the very earliest days of the church, the apostles and first-generation Christians nurtured an earnest expectation and fervent hope that Christ might suddenly return at any time to gather His church to heaven. James, writing what was probably the earliest of the New Testament epistles, expressly told his readers that the Lord's return was imminent:

Be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, waiting patiently for it until it receives the early and latter rain. You also be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand. Do not grumble against one another, brethren, lest you be condemned. Behold, the Judge is standing at the door! (5:7–9).

Peter echoed that same expectation when he wrote, “The end of all things is at hand; therefore be serious and watchful in your prayers” (1 Pet 4:7). The writer of Hebrews cited the imminent return of Christ as a reason to remain faithful: “Let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching” (Heb 10:24–25). He wrote, “Yet a little while, and He who is coming will come and will not tarry” (v. 37).

And the apostle John made the most confident pronouncement of all: “Little children, it is the last hour; and as you have heard that the Antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come, by which we know that it is the last hour” (1 John 2:18). When John recorded his vision in the book of Revelation, he prefaced it by saying these things “must shortly take place” (Rev 1:1).

The New Testament writers often wrote of Christ's “appearing,” and

they never failed to convey the sense that this could happen imminently. “And now, little children, abide in Him, that when He appears, we may have confidence and not be ashamed before Him at His coming” (1 John 2:28; cf. 3:2; Col 3:4; 2 Tim 4:8; 1 Pet 5:4).

All those texts suggest that in the early church expectation of Christ’s imminent return ran high. A solid conviction that Christ could return at any time permeates the whole NT.

When the apostle Paul described the Lord’s coming for the church, he used personal pronouns that show he clearly was convinced he himself might be among those who would be caught up alive to meet the Lord: “We who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord . . . we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air” (1 Thess 4:15, 17). He obviously looked for Christ to return in his lifetime.

He furthermore made it plain that a watchful, hopeful expectancy about Christ’s Second Coming is one of the godly attitudes divine grace teaches all believers:

“For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ” (Titus 2:11–13).

How Could Christ’s Coming Have Been Imminent in the Early Church?

Some argue that Christ’s coming could not possibly have been imminent for the early church, given the obvious fact that two thousand years later, He has still not returned.

Skeptics often ridicule Christianity or challenge the inerrancy of Scripture on that very ground. After all, the verses cited at the beginning of this chapter do prove that James, Peter, John, Paul, and the writer of Hebrews all believed Christ’s return was very near—“at the door” (Jas 5:9); “at hand” (Phil 4:5;

1 Pet 4:7); “approaching” (Heb 10:25); “com[ing] quickly” (Rev 3:11; 22:7).

How can it be, then, that two thousand years later Christ still has not returned? Could the apostles have been in error about the timing? That is precisely what some skeptics claim.

What shall we make of such skeptical allegations? Does the passing of two thousand years indeed prove that Christ’s coming was not imminent in the early church era, and that the apostles were mistaken?

Certainly not. Remember the clear statement of Christ in Matt 24:42: “You do not know what hour your Lord is coming.” The exact time remains hidden from us, as it was from the apostles. But Christ could nonetheless come at any time. The Judge is still at the door. The day is still at hand. There are no other events that must occur on the prophetic calendar before Christ comes to meet us in the air. He could come at any moment. And it is in that sense that Christ’s coming is imminent.

In the very same sense, His coming was imminent even in the days of the early church.

I suppose it is also possible that Christ could delay his coming another two thousand years or longer. Given the rapid decline of society, I do not see how that is possible, but neither did the apostles when they surveyed the state of the world in their time. He still could delay His coming. That is why Christ taught us to be prepared, whether He comes immediately or delays longer than we think possible (cf. Matt 24:42–25:12).

In any case, the passing of two thousand years is no reproach whatsoever against the faithfulness of God or the trustworthiness of His Word. This is precisely the point Peter made when he anticipated the scoffers who would arise, mocking the promise of Christ’s return (2 Pet 3:3-4). Peter’s reply to those scoffers? “With the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day” (v. 8).

The amount of earthly time that passes is of no consequence. It is

certainly irrelevant from God's timeless point of view. A moment is like many eons in His mind, and eons pass like moments. He is not bound by time as we are, and no amount of time can ever nullify His faithfulness. "The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance" (v. 9).

In other words, the real reason for the Lord's delay is not that He is negligent or careless in fulfilling his promises, but simply because He is longsuffering and kind, delaying Christ's coming and the wrath that will accompany it while he calls out people to salvation. And Christ will not return before the merciful purposes of God are complete. Far from suggesting apathy or neglect on God's part, the long delay before Christ's appearing simply underscores the remarkable depth of His nearly inexhaustible mercy and longsuffering.

And therefore the fact that two-thousand years have elapsed is utterly irrelevant to the doctrine of Christ's imminent return. Christ's coming is still imminent. It could occur at any moment. The command to be ready and watchful is as applicable to us as it was to the early church. In fact, the return of Christ should be an even more urgent issue for us, because it is drawing nearer with the passing of each day.

We still do not know when Christ is coming, but we do know that we are two thousand years closer to that event than James was in those earliest days of the Christian era, when the Holy Spirit moved him to warn the church that the coming of the Lord was at hand and the Judge was already standing at the door.