

LIVING WATERS NEWSLETTER

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MAY 2011

CHRIST'S SECOND APPEARING

The Soothsayers of the second advent have been busy since the ascension of Jesus. The Apostle Paul tells the Thessalonians "with regard to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and our gathering together to him, that you may not be quickly shaken from your composure or be disturbed either by a spirit or a message or a letter as from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come" (II Thess. 2:1-2). It was a common belief among some of the "Church Fathers" (men who lived in the immediate years after the Apostles) that they would witness the "second coming" of Christ. David Bercot in *A Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs* cites the following writers: *Barnabas* (70-130 AD) "The Lord will finish all things in six thousand years for a day is with Him as a thousand years." *Ireaneus* (180 AD) "The end times are upon us." *Tertullian* (197 AD) "The second coming of Christ is now near." *Cyprian* (250 AD) "The end of the world is at hand...already the second coming draws nigh." Hippolytus (170-236 AD) predicted the world would end in 500 AD, based on his analysis of the dimensions of Noah's Ark. In a fascinating book entitled *AntiChrist* Bernard McGuinn, professor of historical theology at the Chicago Divinity School traces the opinions of the anti-Christ (at the second coming) from the early days mentioned above to the present day. Paul Boyer, professor of history at the University of Wisconsin, estimates that there are some eight million biblical prophecy buffs today. The doomsday endsayers, the date-setters, the prophets of doom, the writers of million dollar best seller books warning of an eminent rapture and end of the world, all those who have presented failed apocalyptic outbursts of doomsday predictions, never explain or apologize when they are proven wrong (and they always are). The problem is they back off, wait awhile, update their predictions, adjust their scenarios, and start all over again...and their followers don't seem to mind and never hold their leaders accountable for what they say or write. And the bookstores continue to stock their shelves with this religious trash and continue to draw the crowds eager to be tantalized with the latest word concerning the end of these perilous times, then nothing happens. The idea is to see what the media says about the problems in the Middle East (where "the end" always begins), and then prophecies are usually based upon media coverage of world events. For example John F. Walvoord, chancellor and former president of Dallas Theological Seminary wrote a book in 1974 entitled: *Armageddon, Oil and the Middle East Crises* but later revised it in light of the latest news from the Middle East in 1990. The book claims to have sold a million copies in two months during the Gulf War. Then there is Hal Lindsey's best selling prophecy books flooding the market in the 1970's beginning with *The Late Great Planet Earth* which was one of the best selling books of the 1970's and is still in print, claiming total sales of over 25 million copies. It was made into a movie starring assorted atomic bombs and the voice of Orson Wells. Lindsey warns readers to "make no plans beyond 1985" and continues with his latest works of fiction saying the same things, only changing the dates. In 1995 Billy Graham wrote in *Decision* magazine: "each day as we read our newspaper or watch the news on television, we are reminded of the signs Jesus told us to look for. We are seeing them today...ever indication that it will be sooner than we think." Jack Van Impe, popular

T.V. Bible prophecy preacher said the second coming and end of the world would be in the year 2000, then changed the time to between 2001 and 2012. In 1926 Oswald J. Smith, a leading missionary statesman of his day, set the date as 1933. What more could we say about Chuck Smith, 1981; Edgar Whisenant, a retired NASA engineer predicted 1988 then 1999; Charles Dyer, Oct. 28, 1992; Harold Camping 1994 now set at 2011. A national magazine ran an ad recently sponsored by *Family Radio* of Oakland, CA. that proclaims "The Bible guarantees the end of the world May 21, 2011." In his 1991 fundraiser for the 700 Club Pat Robertson warned that "your dollars may not do any good in five years..." (We admit this was a believable prophecy, but he missed it by several years). It may be true, and we are getting a taste of it in our economy today, that America will go through a complete financial collapse. Harry E Figgie Jr., Chairman and founder of Figgie International Inc., a diversified Fortune 500 operating company, wrote a fascinating book in 1992 entitled *Bankruptcy 1995* in which he stated: "In 1995 the U.S.A. as we know it today will cease to exist. That year, the country will have spent itself into bankruptcy from which there will be no return." But this does not mean that the end times have come. Such events, replete in history, have been thought to be "the signs of the times". The last half of the twentieth century and this first decade of the twenty-first century initiated a rash of predictions about the second coming of Christ.

The fact is the "second coming of Christ" is not mentioned in Scripture. Contrary to most Bible interpreters, and this will be hotly disputed, the word "coming" does not refer to what we commonly call "the second coming". The return of Christ in the last day is always spoken of as his "*appearing*", "*revealing*" or "*presence*". Sometimes our English versions translate these words "coming", but has a marginal note showing the Greek word is "*presence*". Note these Scriptures: Hebrews 9:28: "So Christ, also, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, shall *appear* a second time, not to bear sin, to those who eagerly await him, for salvation." I Thessalonians 2:19: "For who is our hope or joy or crown of exultation? Is it not even you before our Lord Jesus at His *presence*?" II Thessalonians 1:7; 2:1, 8: "God will 'give relief to you who are afflicted and us as well, when the Lord Jesus shall be *revealed* from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire'.... 'Now we request you, brethren, with regard to the *presence* of our lord Jesus Christ, and our gathering together unto Him...And that lawless, one will be revealed whom the Lord will slay with the breath of His mouth and bring to an end by the appearance of his *presence*.'" I Timothy 6:14, 15: "Keep the commandment without stain or reproach, until the *appearing* of our Lord Jesus Christ, which He (God) will bring about at the proper time..." II Timothy 4:1, 8: "I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is judge of the living and the dead, and by His *appearing* and His kingdom...In the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day; and not only to me, but go all who have loved His *appearing*." Colossians 3:4: "When Christ, who is our life, is *revealed*, then you also will be *revealed* with Him in glory." I Peter 1:7; 4:13: "the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable even though tested by fire,

may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the *revelation* of Jesus Christ...at the *revelation* of His Glory, you may rejoice with exultation.” I John 2:28: “And now, little children, abide in Him, so that when He *appears* we may have confidence and not shrink away from Him in shame at His *presence*.” I John 3:2: “Beloved, now we are children of God and it has not appeared as yet what we shall be. We know that, when He *appears*, we shall be like Him, because we shall see Him as He is.” There are too many such passages to mention them all, but these are enough to show us the truth of the above statements. The fact that “*appear*” means a form that is seen is evident from the account of His appearance to His disciples after the resurrection (Mark 16:12, 14; Acts 1:3; I Cor. 15:6, 7).

What then does it mean when the word “coming” is used in the Scriptures? In John 14 Jesus mentions His coming four times and it is the same word in each case. Verse 18: “I will not leave you as orphans I will *come to you*.” He had said in verse 3: “I will *come* again, and receive you unto myself.” Verse 23: “If any man loves me he will keep My word and My Father will love him, and We will *come* to him and make Our abode with him.” Verse 28: “you heard that I said to you, ‘I go away, and I will *come to you*’” (they heard him say this in verse 3). Now note carefully verse 29: “And now I have told you before it comes to pass, *that when it comes to pass, you may believe*.” This indicates that when they experienced this they would believe, so it had to be in their lifetime. Did Jesus and the Father (We) come to make their abode with them, and with any man that loves Him and keeps His word”? It was on the day of Pentecost, as recorded in Acts 2 that Jesus and His Father came and made their “abode” with them as He promised. Therefore Jesus could say “I will be with you always, even to the end of the age” (Matt. 28:20), and Paul could say “...Do you not recognize about yourselves, that Christ is in you...” (II Cor. 13:5), and “Christ in you, the hope of glory” (Col. 1:27). Jesus *came* to dwell in His people when the Holy Spirit came, but He did not *appear* or *reveal* Himself at that time. This will happen when He “*appears* a second time not to bear sin, to those who eagerly await Him, for salvation” (Heb. 9:28), and when “we shall see Him just as He is” (I John. 3:2).

The *coming* of Christ is also a phrase referring to His coming in judgment in time as well as judgment in the last day. In the Old Testament God came in judgment upon Israel numerous times concluding in their being taken into Babylonian captivity for 70 years (II Chronicles 36:15-21). In the New Testament Jesus declared that the Father “has given all judgment to the Son...and He gave Him authority to execute judgment because He is the Son of Man” (John 5: 22, 27). In His message to the seven churches in the book of Revelation Jesus warns the church in Ephesus: “...repent and do the deeds you did at first; or else *I am coming to you*, and will remove your lampstand out of its place unless you repent,” the church in Pergamum: “Repent therefore; or else *I am coming* to you quickly, and I will make war against you with the sword of My mouth,” to the church in Sardis: “If therefore you will not wake up *I will come* like a thief and you will not know at what hour *I will come* upon you,” to the church in Philadelphia: “*I am coming quickly*, hold fast what you have, in order that no one take your crown,” to the church in Laodicea: “Because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth” (Rev. 2:5, 16; 3:3,11, 16). The warning is He will *come* in judgment unless they repent.

The prophecies of the return of Jesus as recorded in Matthew 24-26 must be seen in the light of Old Testament prophecies (this is seldom noted by translators and the interpreters of prophecy). Matthew is a gospel written primarily to the Jews, therefore they would have understood these prophecies in the light of the Old Testament prophecies. The prophets many times used catastrophic descriptions of the universe to illustrate the judgment of the Lord upon Israel and the surrounding nations. Some examples: Isaiah 19:1: “The Lord is riding on a swift cloud, and is about to come to Egypt” (in Judgment). Ezekiel 32:7 8: Concerning Egypt: “I will cover the heavens, and darken their stars, I will cover the sun with a cloud, the moon shall not give its light. The shining lights of the heavens I will darken over you and will set darkness on your land, declares the Lord God.” Isaiah 13:10, 13 describes God’s judgment upon Babylon in these words: “For the stars of heaven and their constellations will not flash forth their light; the sun will be dark when it rises, and the moon will not shed light. Therefore I shall make the heavens tremble and the earth will be shaken from its place at the fury of the Lord of hosts in the day of His burning anger.” Even the judgment of God upon Saul when He delivered David from his hand is described as: “Then the earth shook and quaked; and the foundations of the mountains were trembling and were shaken. Smoke went up out of His nostrils, and fire from His mouth devoured; coals were kindled by it. He bowed the heavens also and came down with thick darkness under His feet” (Psalm 18:7, 8). This same language of catastrophic descriptions of the universe are used in the New Testament to describe judgment.

Both words describing His coming (*erkomen*) in judgment and His appearing (*parousia*) the second time are used in Matthew 24-26). The verses referring to His appearing are: 24:3, 27, 37, 39. The other verses translated “coming” is referring to His coming in judgment and is described in the catastrophic language of the Old Testament prophecies. Daniel had prophesied: “I kept looking in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven One like a Son of Man was coming. And He came up to the Ancient of Days, and was presented before Him. And to Him was given dominion, glory and a kingdom” (Dan. 7:13). When Jesus spoke of “the Son of Man coming in the clouds of heaven” (Matt. 24:30; 26:64), the Jewish leaders, who were well versed in the prophecies of the Old Testament would have known exactly what Jesus was talking about, reminiscent of God coming in judgment upon Egypt (Isa. 19:1). He told the High Priest he would *see* “the Son of Man sitting of the right hand of Power and *coming* on the clouds of heaven” (26:64). His “sitting on the right of Power” is indicative of His authority and “coming on the clouds of heaven” is indicative of the use of that authority in bringing judgment upon Jerusalem. Matthew 24:29 is a quotation from Isaiah 13:10: 24:23 and Ezekiel 32:7 describing God’s judgment upon Babylon, the nations, and Egypt. Verse 30 is not referring to a “sign in heaven” rather to the sign that the Son of man is in Heaven. The phrase “in heaven” (“sky” some versions) describes the locality of the Son of Man and not of the sign. A sign did not appear in heaven but the destruction of Jerusalem was to indicate the rule of the Son of Man in heaven.

To many this distinction may not seem to be important, but it gives us a better understanding of prophecy. Instead of basing their predictions on what is reported by the news media the Soothsayers of the second advent should look closer at Scripture.