

“Every Eye Shall See Him”

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—Revelation 1:7

THE SUBJECT OF CHRIST’S

Second Coming is one which has greatly interested professed Christians since Jesus himself spoke prophetically of it nearly two thousand years ago. Many theories have been proposed over the centuries as to the manner and purpose of such a portentous

event. Predictions have come and gone as to when it might take place, with disappointment usually resulting because circumstances did not materialize as expected.

Today, many still believe that the Second Advent of Christ not only will happen, but that it is not far distant in the future. According to recent statistics, 40% of Americans—of all religious affiliations—believe that Jesus’ Second Coming will take place by the year 2050, little more than twenty-five years from now. Even among those Americans claiming no religious affiliation, 20% believe that Christ

will return by 2050. Another interesting statistic: Americans with no college experience (59%) are much more likely than college graduates (only 19%) to expect Jesus' Second Coming by 2050.

Irrespective of how man has viewed this teaching over the centuries, or even of current statistics, the Second Coming of Christ is a most prominent doctrine of the Bible. There are many prophecies, both in the Old Testament and in the New, relating thereto. Many of these prophecies are couched in symbolic language, but some are not. While various symbolisms are used, they are all harmonious when properly understood, and they set forth clearly the essential facts concerning the Lord's return—his Second Presence. During this period of time Christ's long-promised kingdom will be instituted, which will establish the divine will throughout the earth and destroy all enemies of truth and righteousness.

Essential to an understanding of the prophecies pertaining to our Lord's return and Second Presence is the recognition of two important facts. First, in his death Jesus forever gave up his flesh, his humanity, in order to redeem mankind. Second, in his resurrection by the mighty power of God, he was highly exalted to the divine nature, "far above" angels, principalities, and powers. (John 6:51; Eph. 1:19-22; Col. 1:15; I Pet. 3:18) Jesus is now invisible to the human eye, even as God is invisible. Since it is this resurrected, divine Christ who returns, his presence will need to be recognized otherwise than by seeing him with the natural eye. Confirming this, Paul said that we know "Christ after the flesh ... no more."—II Cor. 5:16

While still with his disciples prior to his crucifixion, Jesus said to them, "Yet a little while, and the world seeth me no more; but ye [shall] see me." (John 14:19) His faithful followers will see Christ in his glorious divine body, because in the resurrection they are made like him. John explained this, saying, "It doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is."—I John 3:2

JESUS' APPEARANCES

It is true that Jesus miraculously appeared to his disciples several times following his resurrection. However, on none of these occasions did the disciples see Jesus "as he is"—that is, they did not see his new, divine body. Throughout the Old Testament there are a number of references to the appearances of angels in human bodies. By nature, angels are invisible to the natural eye, and to appear to humans for the purpose of conveying messages it was necessary for them to materialize in human form. They were given divine authority and power to do this, but were not seen by men in their angelic, spiritual bodies.

The resurrected divine Christ also had this power, and used it several times when he appeared to his disciples between his resurrection and ascension. Let us examine some of the facts concerning these appearances. First of all, let us remember that the clothing Jesus used as a man was disposed of at the time of his crucifixion, and that his grave clothes were found in the tomb. His first appearance was to Mary, who thought he was the gardener. Indeed, he was dressed as a gardener,

the clothing being a part of the materialization, as on the occasion of his other appearances. Mary did not recognize Jesus by his looks, or his clothes, but by the familiar tone of his voice when he spoke her name.—John 20:13-16

Another notable appearance by Jesus was to two disciples as they journeyed to Emmaus. (Luke 24:13-32) On this occasion, Jesus evidently talked with his disciples for several hours, yet they did not recognize him. To them he was a “stranger.” He delivered a wonderfully inspiring message to them concerning the necessity for the suffering and death of the Messiah as foretold in the Old Testament scriptures. Yet, they did not recognize who it was that was imparting this wonderful information to them. It was not until the close of the day, when Jesus asked the blessing upon the evening meal, that they realized who he was. Evidently he purposely gave that blessing in his old familiar manner, and it was this that opened their eyes to his identity.

When Jesus appeared to his disciples on the shore of Galilee, he revealed himself to them by suggesting that they cast their nets on the other side of the boat, and they were immediately filled with fish. The reason this was so convincing is that he had performed a similar miracle when he called them into the ministry. (Luke 5:1-11; John 21:1-14) Each of Jesus’ appearances was different from the others, and while they would serve to convince his disciples that he had been raised from the dead, at the same time they realized that he had changed. He was no longer Jesus in the flesh, but a powerful spirit being who could come and go unobserved by

human eyes except when he chose to manifest himself to them by materializing in the form of a human being.

“DOUBTING THOMAS”

One of Jesus' noteworthy appearances to his disciples after his resurrection was in response to the statement made by Thomas, who declared that he would not believe his Master had been raised from the dead unless he could see the nail prints in his hands and feet, and thrust his hand into the wound in his side, inflicted by the sword of a Roman soldier while Jesus was hanging on the cross. Jesus was not visibly present when Thomas made this statement. However, he knew about it, and to satisfy Thomas' skepticism he appeared to all the disciples in a room while the doors were closed. He then asked Thomas to look at his hands and his feet, and to thrust his hand into his side.—John 20:24-29

This incident has been erroneously taken to mean that Jesus will go throughout eternity as a human, with hands, feet, and side scarred. We could just as well say that Jesus will be a gardener forever, or like the “stranger” who walked with the two to Emmaus. What is the true explanation of these incidents of Jesus' appearance? Immediately following his account of Jesus' special appearance to Thomas, John explains the matter, saying, “And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book.”—vs. 30

As John says, all of Jesus' appearances to his disciples, in whatever sort of body he used at the time, were “signs.” They did not see the divine Christ, but only these materialized bodies. Indeed,

they saw human, fleshly bodies. Thomas saw one with nail prints in its hands and feet. He did not see a spirit being, but a fleshly body in which Jesus miraculously appeared. It was by these appearances, and the things which Jesus said to them that they all, finally, were convinced that he had been raised from the dead. Luke wrote concerning Jesus, “Unto whom [the disciples] he also presented himself alive, after he had suffered, by many sure tokens, throughout forty days making himself visible unto them, and speaking the things concerning the kingdom of God.”—Acts 1:3, *Rotherham Emphasized Bible*

SYMBOLIC SIGHT

The question legitimately arises that if Jesus returns at his Second Advent as a divine, invisible being, how is it possible for “every eye” to see him? Will Jesus again materialize and appear as a man in order to convince the world that he has returned? We do not believe so. Rather, a proper understanding of this statement in our opening text is to be found by recognizing that the Bible many times uses the idea of “seeing” or of “sight” to symbolize discernment or understanding.

Referring to the Gospel of the kingdom which he preached, Jesus said that holy men of old had desired to “see” these things, but had been unable to do so. Then, to his disciples the Master said, “Blessed are your eyes, for they see: and your ears, for they hear.” (Matt. 13:16,17) There is no reference to literal eyes and literal sight. The thought is of discernment and understanding that was granted to the disciples by the special favor of the Lord.

When Job was suffering the great affliction which God permitted to come upon him, he said, "Though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God: Whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another; though my reins be consumed within me." (Job 19:26,27) Job was one of God's prophets, and we may understand this to be a prophecy of the time when the "glory of the LORD" will fill the whole earth, and all flesh shall see, or discern, it together. (Isa. 40:5) This is speaking of symbolic vision, for actually, as God himself declared to Moses, "There shall no man see me, and live."—Exod. 33:20

In the case of Job, there was also a more immediate fulfillment of his prophecy. When he had learned the important lesson of the severe trial which had come upon him, Job said to God, "I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth thee." (Job 42:5) This was not a literal vision which Job had of the Almighty, but a discernment, an understanding of God's greatness, his wisdom, his love, and his power. Job had learned to understand the great Creator better as a result of his afflictions, and he describes this understanding as seeing God.

Isaiah 52:10 reads, "The LORD hath made bare his holy arm in the eyes of all the nations; and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God." This is a very revealing symbolic use of the sense of sight. The "holy arm" referred to in this text is Jesus, the Messiah. First, this holy "arm of the LORD" was "despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief." He was "brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep

before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth.”—Isa. 53:1,3,7; Acts 8:32-35

Jesus, God’s “holy arm,” who became “the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world,” was not revealed, or “made bare ... in the eyes of all the nations,” during his earthly ministry—his First Advent. (John 1:29) The prophetic “report” of his greatness as the Messiah was not believed even by those of his own nation except for a small minority who became his devoted followers. (John 1:11,12) He came as the “light of the world,” but the world rejected the light, and continued on in darkness.—John 8:12; 3:19

The plan of God, centered in Jesus as his “holy arm,” to enlighten and bless all the families of the earth, is yet to be accomplished. Isaiah wrote, “The pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in his hand.” (Isa. 53:10) The sacrificial work of Jesus at his First Advent provided redemption for mankind from sin and death, and therefore was essential to the outworking of God’s plan of salvation. However, it is not until the period of his Second Advent that this “holy arm” will be made “bare,” or revealed, “in the eyes of all the nations.” Then “all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God” which Jesus provided at his First Advent when he gave his flesh—his earthly life—for sin-cursed and dying humanity.

We have cited this prophecy as another example of the symbolic use of the sense of sight. No one will contend that the prophecy refers to the literal “arm” of Jehovah. The arm is symbolic, and its being made bare in the eyes of all the nations is also symbolic. It is only because of the false notions

many have had concerning Jesus since his resurrection, and the manner of his return, that they have tried to visualize him literally appearing in clouds as a man, with every literal eye on earth beholding him. If we examine this prophecy in the light of reason, as well as other Scriptures in which the eye and sight are used to denote discernment, it becomes understandable and harmonious with the general testimony of the Word of God.

HE COMES WITH CLOUDS

The first part of our opening text reads, “Behold, he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him.” From a literal standpoint, this is a strange statement, because anything, or any being, coming “with clouds” would most likely be concealed by the clouds. However, the language of this prophecy implies that it is these very “clouds” which reveal the invisible presence of Jesus. Clouds are used in the prophecies of the Bible to symbolize distress and trouble, and Jesus explained to his disciples that one of the signs of his Second Presence would be a time of “great tribulation.”—Matt. 24:21,22

We now note Jesus’ further symbolic prophecy, as recorded by Luke: “There shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars; and upon the earth distress of nations, with perplexity; the sea and the waves roaring; Men’s hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth: for the powers of heaven shall be shaken. And then shall they see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory.”—Luke 21:25-27

Matthew quotes a portion of this same prophecy, which reads, "Then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory." (Matt. 24:30) There is much evidence that the world is even now passing through the foretold time of "great tribulation," and there is already great mourning on the part of "all the tribes of the earth."

The world in general does not yet correctly discern the meaning of the present "distress of nations, with perplexity." To those not acquainted with the "sure word of prophecy," this "sign of the Son of man" has not yet manifested itself. (II Pet. 1:19) However, in due time it will, and then "every eye" will discern the meaning of the tribulation and understand that Christ has returned to establish his long-promised kingdom. Indeed, we believe there are many evidences found in the fulfillment of Bible prophecy that Christ has already returned, invisibly, and is engaged in the preparatory work necessary for the establishment of his kingdom.

THEY THAT PIERCED HIM

Our text emphasizes that "they also" who pierced Jesus will see him, and, together with "all kindreds of the earth," will "wail," or mourn, because of him. The mourning on the part of those who pierced Jesus will be on account of their former rejection of their Messiah. We read, "I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications: and they shall look upon me whom

they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn.”—Zech. 12:10

Such a sorrowful condition is due to the Jews’ belated recognition of Jesus as their Messiah. The prophecies reveal that this mourning will take place near the close of the great tribulation during which all the tribes of the earth likewise mourn because of the distress through which they are passing. This will be the great Armageddon struggle spoken of by John the Revelator. (Rev. 16:16) The climax of this brief period, as indicated in the prophecies, will take place in the ancient land of Israel, into which many Jews are now gathered since its reestablishment as a nation in 1948.

We cannot know in advance all of the details concerning this final climactic phase of the “great tribulation” spoken of by Jesus, since prophecy cannot be fully understood until it is fulfilled. The Prophet Zechariah states that God will “gather all nations against Jerusalem to battle; and the city shall be taken.” Then, however, the prophet continues, “shall the LORD go forth, and fight against those nations, as when he fought in the day of battle,” after which “living waters shall go out from Jerusalem ... And the LORD shall be king over all the earth.”—Zech. 14:2,3,8,9

These words, as well as other Scriptures, indicate that “every eye” will eventually discern the meaning of what takes place in Israel in the closing days of Armageddon. The faithful remnant of Jews who recognize Christ, their Messiah, as the source of their victory over humanly impossible odds will

be the first to benefit from this experience. Others will then follow, and “see” it is the very one whom they “pierced” that has delivered them. The Prophet Ezekiel adds that all those nations which come against Israel at that time, and against whom God will fight and prevail, will also have revealed to them his “holy name ... and the nations shall know that I am the LORD, the Holy One in Israel.”—Ezek. 39:7, *English Standard Version*

When the aforementioned divine intervention does come in the experiences of Israel and all nations, it will be through Christ and his glorified body members. The Christ class will be the spiritual rulers in the Messianic kingdom who will manifest authority and power in the affairs of men. One of the great accomplishments of that kingdom will be the enlightenment of the people concerning the true God and what his will is for them. This will require the entire kingdom period for its accomplishment. First, the generation living at that time will witness the power and great glory with which the kingdom will begin. Then will come the gradual awakening from death of all who have died since Adam. (John 5:28,29; Acts 24:15; I Cor. 15:22) All of these billions will need to be instructed concerning God and his laws of righteousness.

“The law shall go forth of Zion, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem,” we read in Micah 4:1-4. “Zion” here is a symbol of the spiritual phase of the kingdom, consisting of Jesus and his glorified church, who are brought forth in the first resurrection to be associated with Christ in his thousand-year reign. (Heb. 12:22; Rev. 14:1; 20:6) “Jerusalem” represents the human, or visible, phase of the

kingdom. (Zech. 14:11,16) This will be made up of the ancient, faithful servants of God, beginning with righteous Abel. John the Baptist was perhaps the last of these. These will be made “princes in all the earth.”—Ps. 45:16

The “word of the LORD,” or the truth concerning God and his will and law, will be made known to the people, Jew and Gentile alike, through these human representatives of the kingdom, who will be its earthly rulers. The obedient subjects of the kingdom, beginning with the remnant of believing Israelites, will, as they gain knowledge, assist in enlightening others. As we have noted, this grand work will not be accomplished all at once. Quoting the words of the prophet: “It shall come to pass in that day, that the light shall not be clear, nor dark: But it shall be one day which shall be known to the LORD, not day, nor night: but it shall come to pass, that at evening time it shall be light.”—Zech. 14:6,7

Light is a symbol of truth—of understanding. (Ps. 43:3; John 3:21) However, the light of the kingdom will not be wholly clear at the beginning. As our text declares, “every eye” will discern the presence of the Master during the opening period of that day, but there will be much more for mankind to learn. As we have seen also, there will be the further work of enlightening all who are awakened from the sleep of death. Not until the close of the kingdom will the “vail” of misunderstanding that is “spread over all nations” be fully removed from the eyes of all the people. (Isa. 25:7) It will be then that “the knowledge of the LORD” shall fill the earth “as the waters cover the sea.”—Isa. 11:9

Not only will mankind receive the blessing of enlightenment, but peace, health, and life will flow out to the people. God will then “swallow up death in victory,” and wipe away the “tears from off all faces.” (Isa. 25:8) Truly, the prospect for Israel and for the people of all nations is glorious. While distress and trouble are rampant in the earth today, this situation is soon to give place to the authority of Christ’s kingdom, through the agencies of which there shall be lasting peace, security, happiness, and life to all the willing and obedient of mankind. How the people will then rejoice as they “see” and discern not only Christ, but also their loving Heavenly Father. “And it shall be said in that day, Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, and he will save us: this is the LORD; we have waited for him, we will be glad and rejoice in his salvation.” —vs. 9 ■

The Unfailing One

*The little sharp vexations,
And the briars that catch and fret
Why not take all to the Helper
Who has never failed us yet.*

*Tell Him about the heartache
And tell Him the longings too;
Tell Him the baffled purpose
When we scarce know what to do.*

*Then leaving all our weakness
With the One Divinely strong,
Forget that we bore the burden,
And carry away the song.*

—selected