

The Morning Star: Christ Came Twice at His First Coming and will Come Twice at His Second

by Jeremy James



Born-again Christians are blessed who live daily in the expectation that Christ may return at any time. One of the greatest marks of a true Christian is the joy that he or she finds in the imminence of this momentous event.

A few decades ago, most born-again Christians were keen to speak about the Rapture and the Second Coming, but this sense of expectation has waned considerably. Increasingly the Enemy is getting professing Christians to believe instead in one of two unbiblical alternatives.

The first is Dominionism, which is taught by the New Apostolic Reformation, led by C Peter Wagner, Rick Joyner, Bill Johnson and the like. This is founded on the false belief that man himself must claim 'dominion' over the world and transform it – politically, socially and spiritually – before Christ can return. This foolishness is also taught by the Roman Catholic Church, but in a less obvious way.

Dominionism or Kingdom Now theology is a patently rebellious teaching since it rejects the many prophetic statements in Scripture that speak of a worldwide spiritual and moral collapse in the end times. As the Apostle Paul stated: **"This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come...Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution. But evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived."** (2 Timothy 3).

The End Time apostasy will be more than just a marked departure from Biblical truth but a flagrant perversion of Scripture to accommodate gnostic beliefs. As Isaiah put it, evil will be regarded as good, and good evil.

The other main unbiblical alternative is a Rapture that takes place only at the moment Jesus returns in full view of the entire world. While there are varying views as to the timing of the Rapture, the idea that it will be delayed until the final hours of the Tribulation is plainly wrong.

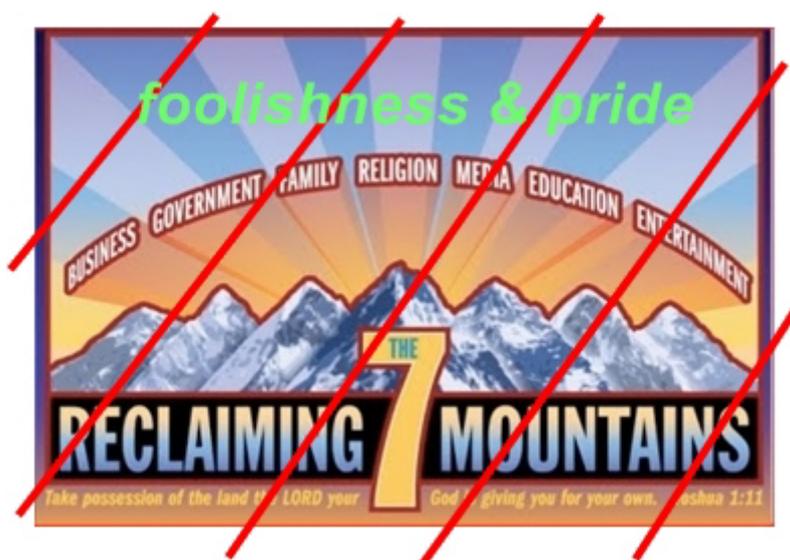
It is this particular false teaching – the 'final hours rapture' – that we would like to address in this paper.

The Biblical position

Some believers, whose sincerity and devotion are not in question, are very uncomfortable with a Rapture that seems to relieve the church of the need to go through part of the Tribulation. They are concerned that such a belief would cause the church to become complacent or other-worldly, and possibly oblivious to the dangerous forces working against her.

There are two clear answers to this. Firstly, our task is to establish the actual Biblical position. Whether or not we are 'comfortable' with an interpretation that points to an 'early' Rapture is irrelevant. The Bible spells out what God intends to do, and it is our task to study it closely and accept what He is telling us.

Secondly, there is no evidence that belief in an early Rapture would lead to complacency. Rather, the opposite should be expected. A church that lives daily in the knowledge that Christ could return at any time is a vibrant and obedient church, a church whose members count the blessings and opportunities in each passing day. The real cause of complacency in the church today is the false belief that man himself will prepare the world for the return of Christ. Dominionism ignores the wrath of God and the sheer wretchedness of our fallen human condition, replacing it instead with a deluded optimism and a foolish 'we can do it' mentality.



Furthermore, Scripture makes it perfectly clear that the church can undergo persecution at any time. The treatment of our brothers and sisters in Syria is disturbing evidence of this. And yet, even though these appalling atrocities are well known to the church – a church whose members in the main do not believe in an imminent Rapture – complacency at an institutional level could hardly be greater.

Christ came *twice* at his First Coming

One of the most frequently heard arguments against the imminence of the Rapture and the 'silent' return of Christ is that the Bible never speaks of his return in two stages, the first time for the church and the second, some years later, to quell the rebellion of the Antichrist. We will show why this argument is false and why Christians must set aside their opinions and study the scriptural basis for this wonderful event very, very carefully.

It is sad to relate that one of the most compelling reasons for believing in an imminent Rapture is hardly ever mentioned, even by its most ardent defenders. The critics argue that, since Christ came only once at his first coming, he'll come only once at his second. But they are wrong! Why? Because Christ came TWICE at his first coming.

Let's consider the facts. Jesus was born in Bethlehem and died some thirty years later on Calvary. His body was buried for three days and three nights. He then returned when his body was restored to life at the Resurrection. While he was dead he was not with mankind. His spirit was elsewhere and his body lay in the grave. After his Resurrection he spent forty days with mankind before ascending bodily into heaven.

While on the cross, just prior to his death, Jesus cried with a loud voice, **"Father, to Thy hands I commit my spirit;" and these things having said, he breathed forth the spirit.**" (Luke 23:46) [Young's Literal Translation].

This marked the end of the first part of his first coming. The second part of his first coming began with the Resurrection and ended with the Ascension.



The Mount of Olives.

Now let's consider another important fact. In the first part of his first coming Jesus was accessible to all mankind. Whoever chose to come before him could do so. The choice lay with the individual. Furthermore, as regards his accessibility, no distinction was made between those who believed in him and those who did not.

However, in the second part of his first coming, he alone decided who would have access to him. Paul lists for our benefit the persons who were blessed with the opportunity to meet with him after his Resurrection:

"And that he was seen of Cephas [Peter], then of the twelve [Apostles]: After that, he was seen of above five hundred brethren at once; of whom the greater part remain unto this present, but some are fallen asleep. After that, he was seen of James [the brother of Jesus]; then of all the apostles. And last of all he was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time." (1 Corinthians 15:5-8)

The meticulous way these appearances are recorded would seem to imply that the list is complete.

Between his Resurrection and his Ascension, Jesus appeared ONLY to believers. He did not appear to anyone who did not believe in him before his death. In short, he appeared only to the Church. Furthermore the figure, "**above five hundred brethren**," would suggest that he appeared to the full membership of the Church at that time.

Christ will come both *for* and *with* his saints

If we now take what we have learned and apply it to the Second Coming, we will see that Jesus will do exactly what he promised his disciples:

"I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also." (John 14:2-3)

Here the Lord is declaring that he will come for his saints, the church [specifically the true church].



Scripture also tells us that he will come with his saints. Sceptics contend that the "saints" in question are the angels, and only the angels, since the word in Greek ("**Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousands of his saints**" - **Jude 1:14**) is *hagios*, meaning "holy ones." Thus *hagios* could mean angels or saints or both. This usage also appears in the Hebrew text, where Deuteronomy 33:2 ("**and he came with ten thousands of saints**") uses the word *qodesh* for "saints", which is generally taken to be a reference to the angels or "holy ones."

These are excellent points and call for a strong response. This may be found in the Book of Revelation where reference is made several times to the 24 elders in heaven at the time of the opening of the seven seals. They are there, with their crowns, before the seven-year Tribulation begins. We know they are men and not angels because -

- (a) they wear crowns (which shows that each has been judged by Jesus and awarded an imperishable crown – there is no reference in Scripture to the awarding of crowns to angels);
- (b) the text notes that they were "**clothed in white raiment**," a detail indicating their imputed righteousness, something that applies only to men and not to angels;
- (c) they sing a song of praise to the Lamb which includes the words, "**...for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood**" (**Revelation 5:9**) (angels are not redeemed by the blood of the Lamb, but men only).

The number 24 is likely a reference to the 24 "courses" or divisions of the Levitical priesthood that were established by David. The head of each course or division was representative of its entire membership. Thus the elders in heaven are representative of the priesthood of all believers, namely the church of Christ.



The Whore of Babylon – illustration from Martin Luther's 1534 translation of the Bible

If they were in heaven before the Great Tribulation began, and had already been judged, clothed in white raiment, and given their imperishable crowns, then they must have been part of the First Resurrection. They had either been resurrected from their graves or taken up in the Rapture. Either way, in order to be judged, they had to have received their immortalized physical bodies.

Scripture tells us that the resurrection/rapture of the church – comprising both the saints who have died or those who are still alive at the time – will take place on the same day, "**in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye**" (1 Corinthians 15:52). If the twenty-four elders are in heaven, then so are all true believers who came to Christ between Pentecost and the Rapture.

Just as Christ called Lazarus from the earth, he will personally call all of his saints from the earth (very possibly by name). In doing so he will fulfil his promise, "**I will come again, and receive you unto myself.**"

He will come as the bridegroom to take his betrothed to her new home where she will live with him forever:

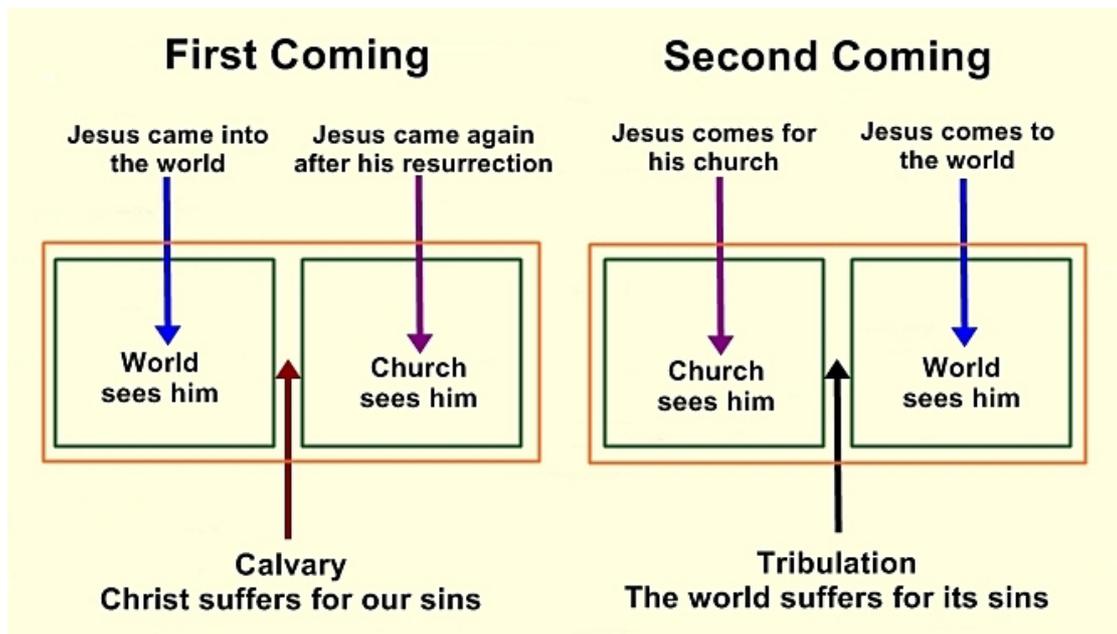
"For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord."

(1 Thessalonians 4:16-17)

This wonderful event is the first part of his Second Coming. Note that it mirrors the second part of his First Coming. Both are concerned only with the Church.

By the same token, the second part of his Second Coming mirrors the first part of his First Coming. Both are concerned with the world as a whole and Israel in particular.

The following diagram illustrates the connection between the First and Second Coming:



Christ spoke of the Rapture

Many professing Christians overlook the explicit reference to the Rapture which Jesus made during his ministry:

"Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this?" (John 11:25-26)

Alas, many in the church do *not* believe it.

His words are very plain: Those who believed in him while they were alive, but are now dead ("**though they were dead**"), they shall live again. And those who are alive when he comes, and believe, will never die. The first category is resurrected from the grave and the second is taken up in the Rapture.

The Morning Star and the Sun of Righteousness

The Bible also makes reference to the two appearances of Christ at his Second Coming. The first is the Morning Star, when Christ comes for his bride, and the second is the Sun of Righteousness, when Christ appears in glory to rule on earth with a rod of iron.

In Middle Eastern cultures the morning star was the celestial object known as Venus, the appearance of which was traditionally a sign that night was ending, dawn was commencing and the sun would shortly rise.

In the great spiritual darkness of the End Time, during the period of labor pains or birth pangs leading up to the Great Tribulation, Biblical truth will have almost disappeared from off the earth. Everywhere men will ask, "**Where is the promise of his coming?**" (2 Peter 3:4). But faithful Christians will stand firm and patiently await the Morning Star. Before the world is stunned by the "**brightness of his coming**" (2 Thessalonians 2:8), when he rises like the sun ("**the Sun of righteousness**" - Malachi 4:2), Christ will make a less visible appearance – from an earthly perspective – as the "**bright and morning star**" (Revelation 22:16). Just as the morning star heralds the rising of the sun, so the resurrection/rapture, when the saints meet the Lord in the air, will 'announce' the second part, the earthly coming of the Sun of Righteousness.

The Millennium

During the thousand-year period known as the Millennium Christ Jesus will also have the character of a Morning Star as he prepares the earth for entry into the Eternal State – "**behold, his reward is with him, and his work before him**" (Isaiah 40:10 and 62:11). Only then, at the sunrise of a new creation, will our heavenly Father, the Lord God Almighty, appear in and with the New Jerusalem:

"Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God... And I saw no temple therein: for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it. And the city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it: for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof." (Revelation 21: 3; 22-23)

The Seven Churches of Revelation

In his letters to the churches in Revelation, Christ speaks of the different characteristics and aspects of the professing church in history. This is not the saved church – the true church – but the broad church, being a mixture of those who are truly born again and those who profess to be Christian but who have not yet given their hearts to Christ. To the former he makes a number of special promises:

"...and I will give thee [Smyrna] a crown of life" (Revelation 2:10)

"... and will give him [Pergamos] a white stone, and in the stone a new name written" (Revelation 2:17)

"...and I will give unto every one of you [Thyatira] according to your works." (Revelation 2:23)

"But that which ye [Thyatira] have already hold fast till I come...And I will give him the morning star." (Revelation 2:25-28).

Of the seven churches, only two were blameless, namely Smyrna and Philadelphia. Since it is unlikely that the latter will not receive any of the special gifts, the gifts themselves must apply generally, where appropriate, to the believing church as a whole. Thus the gift in Revelation 2:28 – the gift of the morning star – will almost certainly be given to all who **"hold fast till I come,"** namely all *true believers* who are alive at the time of the Rapture. They will receive **"the morning star"** when they are taken up to meet the Lord in the air. The Lord himself is the morning star at that glorious moment when he returns for his bride.

Peter referred to this wonderful event at the dawn of the Millennium, when the spiritual darkness of this rebellious age is about to end and Christ, the morning star, arises in our hearts:

"We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts:" (2 Peter 1:19)

Biblically it is significant that a star proclaimed the incarnation of the **"Star out of Jacob"** (Numbers 24:17). At his first coming Christ gave a token of his glory as our 'Morning Star' when his birth was announced by a **"star in the east."** This must have been a star of unusual brilliance, akin to the morning star. Furthermore, since the members of Herod's court did not see the star (Herod questioned the wise men and **"inquired of them diligently what time the star appeared"**), we can safely infer that the star was not visible to non-believers.



We know that the wise men were believers since they came **"to worship him."** This is how it will be at the time of the Rapture, when only true believers will see the Morning Star. They will be like the wise men who, when they saw the star, **"rejoiced with exceeding joy"** (Matthew 2:10). The second part of his Second Coming, however, when he comes in great wrath to punish the wicked, will be seen by the entire world.

Conclusion

In one of his excellent radio talks, Vernon McGee – whose expository teaching on the Bible was both very accessible and of a consistently high standard – said that, in his opinion, all sermons should refer to the Resurrection. Since the Resurrection of Christ was 'the First Fruits' in God's wonderful plan of redemption for mankind, it was – as the LORD intended – the first phase of a general resurrection of all true believers. In Biblical Israel the presentation of the first fruits was a designated feast day in the LORD's calendar for mankind and a token of the great harvest that would follow. The resurrection-rapture of the church will constitute the second phase of the Resurrection (the resurrection of Christ being the first). The third and final phase of this marvellous ingathering will take place at the start of the Millennium, when all Jewish believers and Tribulation saints will be resurrected.

Dr McGee was emphasizing something of the utmost importance to every true believer. He was painfully aware of the apostasy that was well under way throughout the church even in his day. He knew that, as this got worse, both the Cross and the Resurrection would fade into the background and that the majority of professing Christians would find their greatest comfort in worldly values and goals.

The Apostle Paul taught all new disciples to look to the Rapture. They were to live each day in the expectation of our Saviour's imminent return. They were to prepare and sanctify themselves for this holy occasion. It was to be the center around which their whole world revolved. As true believers it was their privilege to live in the expectation of this wonderful event and to spend the remainder of their time here on earth sharing this good news with others.

As early as chapter 15, the Book of Genesis expressed the awesome truth at the heart of the Rapture:

**"After these things the word of the LORD came unto Abram in a vision, saying,
Fear not, Abram: I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward."
(Genesis 15:1)**

Christians have for too long thought of *heaven* as their reward, but the Bible points emphatically to the real reward for all true believers, namely Christ himself. By looking to heaven as their reward, they have been tempted by earthly reflections of the world to come – as they imagine them to be – but there is no earthly reflection of Christ. The Holy Spirit within us points continually to Christ, and Christ alone, and it behoves us to heed what He is telling us. He never points to heaven (or the Bible would have told us so) but always and only to Christ – a truth that will be realized perfectly at the Rapture.

The book of Genesis includes two remarkable episodes depicting the supernatural deliverance of the saints. The first relates to Noah and the second to Lot. While the angels were urging Lot to leave Sodom before the wrath of God fell upon it, one of them made a most revealing statement:

"Haste thee, escape thither; for I cannot do any thing till thou be come thither." (Genesis 19:22)

Abraham had prevailed upon the Lord, the pre-incarnate Christ, to spare the cities of the plain if at least ten righteous persons could be found there. During his supplication he asked two very pointed questions: **"Wilt thou also destroy the righteous with the wicked? ... Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" (Genesis 18:23-25)**

The Lord heard his prayer and sent his angels to remove Lot, the only righteous man, and his family. The angels impressed upon Lot that they could not proceed with the destruction of the city until Lot and his own were safely removed. Lot was so hesitant that the angels actually had to take him and his family by the hand and lead them out. At this point we are given one of the most beautiful verses in God's holy Word: **"And while he lingered, the men [i.e the angels] laid hold upon his hand, and upon the hand of his wife, and upon the hand of his two daughters; the LORD being merciful unto him: and they brought him forth, and set him without the city." (Genesis 19:16)**

Note and hold fast to those wonderful words, **"... the LORD being merciful unto him"!**

We need to reflect deeply on this passage since it is a startling prefiguration of the Rapture of the church before the Great Tribulation. It also foreshadows the perfect protection that the LORD will provide through His holy angels to the righteous remnant of Israel during the **"time of Jacob's trouble" (Jeremiah 30:7).**

Today most Bible-believing Christians live in or near the cities of the plain. In the eyes of God, these places are **more** sinful than Sodom and Gomorrah, Admah and Zeboim. Christ revealed this when he sent the seventy disciples, in teams of two, to preach the gospel in towns and villages throughout Galilee and Judea:

"Even the very dust of your city, which cleaveth on us, we do wipe off against you: notwithstanding be ye sure of this, that the kingdom of God is come nigh unto you. But I say unto you, that it shall be more tolerable in that day for Sodom, than for that city." (Luke 10:11-12)

What is more he said that, had the works he performed in Capernaum been witnessed in Sodom, it would have remained to this day.

**"And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted unto heaven, shalt be brought down to hell: for if the mighty works, which have been done in thee, had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day."
(Matthew 11:23)**

The gospel of the kingdom has been preached for centuries across the length and breadth of the western world, and yet the majority of our population are largely indifferent to its message. Using the criterion given by Christ, our cities are now in greater spiritual darkness than when the LORD destroyed Sodom.

Even the best among us has done nothing to deserve the Rapture. However, just as Abraham interceded for Lot, Christ has interceded for each one of us. The LORD in heaven will do exactly as He promised in His holy Word. He will send His wonderful Son, our morning star, before opening the Seals of His righteous judgment.

When Christ paid our sin debt on our behalf, he freed us from the wrath to come. Instead of doubting the fearful reality of our Father's righteous anger, true believers should be convincing the world that sin will be judged, and judged severely, all the while highlighting the fate of Sodom as a terrible foretaste of what to expect. The second part of the Second Coming will be a great shock to a world that had envisaged a Lamb but encountered a Lion, **"In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Thessalonians 1:8).**

These truths are very simple and easy to understand! So why aren't pastors preaching them? Why aren't true believers shouting them from the rooftops?

If anyone thinks he will not be questioned on this at the Bema, let him think again:

"Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" (Genesis 18:25)

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